image

45 MAR

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN

Capullo 96

McFarlane Brian

DECAPITATION.

THE ONLY WAY TO **END** THE BATTLE, TO ACHIEVE **TRUE** VICTORY OVER THE ACCURSED **HELLSPAWN.**

THOSE WHO'VE BEEN TUTORED TO HUNT HELL'S OFFICERS-IN-TRAINING **KNOW** THIS-- AND KNOW AS WELL THAT, LACKING HEAVEN'S REGULATION WEAPON, THIS IS THE RECOMMENDED METHOD.

ONCE THE HELLSPAWN HAS BEEN SUFFICIENTLY WEAKENED OR DISORIENTED, A **FINAL** BLOW-- CLEAN AND SWIFT-- **VOIDS** THE CREATURE AND ITS LIVING SHELL FROM THIS LEVEL OF EXISTENCE.

ITS SEVERED HEAD IS PROOF OF THAT FINALITY.

THEN AND **ONLY** THEN WILL THE UNDEAD FINALLY **DIE.**

FOR THE VICTOR, IT MEANS AN IMMEDIATE PROMOTION INTO FLIGHT LEVEL ONE.

THIS SHOULD BE THE RIGHTEOUS GOAL OF **EVERY** ANGEL.

EVEN FOR **THIS** PRIZE, THOUGH, **FEW** ANGELS HAVE VENTURED INTO BATTLE AGAINST THE HELLSPAWN. IT'S VIRTUALLY A **SUICIDAL** ACT, WITH NO DOCUMENTED SUCCESS BY ANY STUDENT.

IF EVER THAT DAY COMES TO PASS, A NEW **STAR** WILL SHINE IN GOD'S RANKS.

HER PRAISES SUNG FOR ALL ETERNITY.

HOLY MASTER, YOU'VE ANSWERED MY PRAYERS-- GIVEN ME STRENGTH TO...

FOR **SHE** WILL NOT HAVE BEEN FOOLED BY THE SPAWN'S TRICKERY.

THE *HEAD*-- IT'S...?!

NOT QUITE...

IT'S NOT *REAL!* THE DAMNED THING'S USING ITS *MAGIC!*

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THE CREATURE'S CLOAK HAD BRIEFLY OBSCURED ITS **HEAD**... LONG ENOUGH FOR A MOUND OF HIDDEN **WORMS** TO SLITHER FROM THE HUNDREDS OF FOLDS TWISTING THROUGHOUT THE BLOOD-RED CAPE...

...TAKING **SHAPE** RIGHT NEXT TO THE HELLSPAWN'S EXPOSED **THROAT.**

SHE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UNAWARES HAD THIS YOUNG ANGEL NOTICED THAT HER FALLEN PREY HAD BEEN WEARING A **MASK** BUT MOMENTS EARLIER.

TOOK THE BAIT, DID YOU?

GOOD.

I DON'T KNOW WHY ANY OF THIS IS HAPPENING, BUT YOU TELL HEAVEN I'M NOT **READY** TO DIE!

HOW DARE THEY SEND A CHILD TO DO THEIR KILLING?!

AL SIMMONS PLAYS THE GAME.

HELL'S SYMBIOTIC UNIFORM IS ASSISTING HIS BROKEN BODY'S EVERY MOVE. AL KNOWS THERE MUST BE NO SIGN OF **WEAKNESS**.

THE PACKAGE **MUST** APPEAR WHOLE: SYMBIONT AND LIVERY WORKING AS **ONE**.

ANGELA. THAT TRAITOROUS **WHORE**. I'LL NOT LET **EITHER** OF YOU MOCK OUR CAUSE.

ANGELA WAS TOO **GOOD** FOR YOUR GOD.

NOT EVER!

A MOMENT. SHE'D TAKEN HER EYE OFF HIM FOR ONLY A **MOMENT.**

WHAT...?

NOW, THE NIGHT WIND **HOWLS,** RESONATING IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THE ROGUE ANGEL PREPARES FOR ANYTHING.

OR **EVERY-THING.**

SHOW YOUR SELF DEMON!

IT DOES.

UNDERGROUND, WHERE **MADNESS** REIGNS.

FROM THE ONE DIRECTION SHE HADN'T PREPARED FOR.

SHE'D BEEN TAUGHT THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF SUNLIGHT DWELLS **EVIL,** AND THAT THE GREATEST EVIL LIVES **BELOW... UNDER-GROUND,** IN ETERNAL **BLACKNESS.**

WHERE GOD'S GRACE IS **FORBIDDEN.**

FOREVER.

ALREADY SPARKED BY THE NIGHT'S VISITORS, THE HELLSPAWN HAS NOW ABSORBED LATENT EVIL FLOWING IN THE **SOIL**.

ALL THIS RICH NOURISH-MENT HAS LEFT IT SWEPT UP IN A HELLISH **HIGH!**

... AND MAKING IT CARELESS.

THE ANGEL-WARRIOR **SEIZES** THE OPENING--

-- PRAYING SHE CAN GAIN THE ADVANTAGE--

--AND SOMEHOW **END** THIS UNHOLY BATTLE.

...FUNERAL OF LOUIS BANKS, CHIEF OF NEW YORK CITY'S 12TH PRECINCT. A LONE MOTORCYCLE ESCORT WAS THE TOKEN HONOR GUARD FOR THIS CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE.

HIS FREQUENT CAREER SHIFTS--PRIVATE SECURITY OPERATOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVE, POLICE COMMANDER--SHOW A MAN OF RARE AMBITION. INFORMATION LEAKED JUST BEFORE HIS SUICIDE, HOWEVER, RAISED ALLEGATIONS OF LONG-STANDING TIES TO ORGANIZED CRIME.

SEVERAL DRAMATIC EVENTS HAVE BEEN TIED TO BANKS. AN ATTACK MONTHS AGO ON THE C.I.A.'S NEW YORK OFFICES IS SEEN AS A REVENGE ATTACK ON HIS FORMER EMPLOYERS. THE BOMBING MINUTES LATER OF A NEIGHBORING SECURITIES BROKERAGE WAS THEN INTENDED TO ASSIST HIS AGENTS IN THEIR ESCAPE. THE CHILD-KILLING SPREE OF WILLIAM KINCAID HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS PART OF AN EXTORTION SCHEME.

THE N.Y.P.D.'S OFFICE OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS HAS LAUNCHED AN INVESTIGATION, QUIETING FOR NOW THE POINTED QUESTIONS RAISED BY SOME MEDIA OUTLETS.

NOTHING SAYS 'NEW YORK' MORE THAN A POIGNANT DISPLAY. OF ***COURSE*** I'M TALKING ABOUT FUNERALS. THE BOYS IN BLUE BURIED THEIR DARKEST KNIGHT YESTERDAY, IN THE FORM OF THE BOWERY'S CHIEF LOUIS BANKS.

IN CLEVER COUNTERPOINT TO HIS SHORTCOMINGS WITH PROCESSES OF ***JUSTICE,*** BANKS' SEND-OFF WAS THE ***MODEL*** OF RESTRAINT. THE PROCESSION WAS LED BY A SOLITARY OFFICER ON A MOTORCYCLE... A SIGHT MORE HEART-RENDING THAN TWO COPS IN A SQUAD CAR COULD ***POSSIBLY*** HAVE BEEN, AND PROBABLY EASIER TO ASSIGN. BRINGING UP THE REAR WAS THE HEARSE ITSELF, CARRYING ONLY THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR, THE LATE CHIEF, AND HIS WIDOW. WHAT ***TASTE!***

MY SOURCES TELL ME THE DECEASED WORE BLACK.

HERE'S ONE FOR THE BOOKS. IN THE CATEGORY *"DECEASED WILD MEN WHO DIDN'T KNOW HOW OR WHEN TO STOP,"* COULD ***ANY*** NOMINEE BE MORE OF A SHOO-IN THAN OUR OWN ***CHIEF BANKS?*** NOT ***ONLY*** WAS HE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER A MEMBER OF EVERY SECURITY OR POLICING SERVICE KNOWN TO ***MAN,*** BUT, IF ALL OF OFFICIALDOM IS TO BE BELIEVED, HE WAS ***AT THE SAME TIME*** MASTERMINDING CRIMINAL AND TRAITOROUS ACTS AFFECTING EVERYONE SOUTH OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY! CHIEF BANKS, ***YOU THE MAN!***

MY CONFIDENCE IN HIS NOMINATION IS BACKED UP BY THE UNANIMINITY OF THE ***FINGER-POINTING.*** THE WORD ON THE STREET AND IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICES IS THAT OUR MAN BANKS ***SINGLE-HANDEDLY*** RAISED THE ***MONEY,*** PROCURED THE ***ORDINANCE,*** RECRUITED ***AND*** TRAINED HIS OWN ***PRIVATE ARMY,*** AND CARRIED OUT ***SEVERAL*** SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONS WHILE IN THE EMPLOY OF NEW YORK'S FINEST. OF ***COURSE*** HE DIED CHILDLESS. WHEN WOULD HE HAVE FOUND THE TIME TO RAISE KIDS ***AND*** AN ARMY?

C'MON, TWITCH, SIT ***DOWN***--YOU'RE MAKIN' ME ANTSY. SO HOW'S THE SEARCH GOIN'?

OKAY. BUT I'M NOT GETTING ANY CLOSER TO LOCATING SPAWN.

KIK

THE PEOPLE I TALKED TO SAID THEY HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR AWHILE. HE'S JUST DISAPPEARED, AND NONE OF THE HOMELESS FOLKS COULD TELL ME IF OR WHEN HE'LL RETURN. THE ONLY ***HOPEFUL*** SIGN IS THAT HE'S DONE THIS ONCE BEFORE, SO IT'S FAIR TO ASSUME HE'LL APPEAR AGAIN.

AND HOW LONG WILL ***THAT*** TAKE? A WEEK? A MONTH? YOU CAN'T KEEP THIS CHARADE GOING FOREVER.

I KNOW, SIR. BUT I JUST CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO TELL HER.

SHE'S YOUR ***WIFE***, TWITCH, YOU OWE HER THE ***TRUTH***. AT SOME POINT THE MONEY'S GOING TO RUN OUT.

TEK

THEN WHAT?

LOOK, I'M NOT TRYING TO RUN YOUR LIFE, BUT WE BOTH KNOW THAT SOONER OR LATER THEY'LL FIND OUT WE WERE ***FIRED***.

THEN, THEY'LL BE WONDERING WHERE YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING ALL YOUR FREE TIME. YOU DON'T ***NEED*** THOSE COMPLICATIONS.

I GUESS I'M HOPING THAT IF WE FIND SPAWN AND SORT THROUGH THE WHOLE CHIEF BANKS SUICIDE FIASCO, THEN THE BOARD WILL SEE WE WERE ***WRONGLY*** DISMISSED, AND ***REINSTATE*** US.

PIZZA

FIRST OFF, ***SCREW*** THE BOARD AND THEIR JOBS. WE DON'T NEED 'EM. I'VE GOT BIGGER PLANS FOR US.

YOU JUST SIT HERE...

SQUISH

...I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

Um... MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. I ALWAYS VOWED I WOULDN'T KEEP ANY SECRETS FROM HER.

THE SILLY THING IS, SHE'D PROBABLY UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY.

IT MUST BE SOME MALE THING, ME WANTING TO PROVIDE FOR THE FAMILY, TAKE CARE OF THEM.

DUNK'D DONUTS

AT LEAST YOU ***HAVE*** A FAMILY.

HERE, CATCH!

WHOOO...

CRISCO

OH MY GOD, WHAT IS THIS, SIR?!

A PIPE-DREAM.

SEE, I FIGURED THAT SOMEDAY I'D HAVE A WIFE. A FAMILY. A NICE LITTLE PICKET FENCE AROUND THE HOUSE. SO I TUCKED AWAY A PIECE OF EVERY PAYCHECK, WAITING FOR THE DREAM TO COME TRUE... BUT IT'S *NOT*. I REALIZED THAT A *WHILE* AGO.

IT'S *TOO LATE* FOR THAT DREAM. BUT I'VE ALWAYS HAD ANOTHER. ONE MORE REALISTIC.

SUCH AS?

MY OWN *AGENCY*. DOING PRIVATE DETECTIVE WORK.

SO YOU GO BACK TO THE FORCE IF YOU LIKE, BUT *I'M THROUGH*. IT'S JUST THAT... WELL... I THOUGHT IT'D BE GREAT IF I HAD A *PARTNER*.

LIKE *YOU*.

I LOVE YOU, TOO.

I LOVE YOU, MAN!

...I MEAN, SIR.

LEGEND HAS CALLED IT "THE BLACK DISPERSAL". THE DETAILS MAY DIFFER IN REGION, BUT THE ACT REMAINS FAIRLY CONSISTENT.

A SILENT SIGNAL GOES OUT, ALERTING ALL OCCUPANTS OF THE SHADOWED LANDS.

'LIGHT' IS TRESPASSING ONCE AGAIN.

HELLSPAWN! MOVE YOURSELF!

HE HASN'T BEGUN HIS REGENERATION, YET.

SO, THE UNWANTED VISITOR MUST BE DISTRACTED... LULLED INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY...

... UNTIL THEY HAVE LINGERED PAST THE POINT OF NO RETURN.

SNARED IN A HIDDEN TRAP.

CONDENSING ITS INTERNAL NEURO-SYSTEMS FLOW, THE HELLSPAWN FORCES EACH PLASM STRAND TO GATHER ITS DARK EVIL TO A SINGLE POINT:

..., A CONCENTRATE OF **PURE, MALICIOUS ENERGY.**

IT IS THEN **RELEASED,** USUALLY THROUGH THE **CHEST,** IN A CONVULSIVE EXPLOSION THAT SHOWERS ITS INTENDED TARGET WITH THE UNSPEAKABLE AURA OF THE **DAMNED.**

6:7:8:6

NOW TAINTED, THE VICTIM BECOMES A **BEACON.**

FOR HER PART, THE ROGUE ANGEL IS NOW READY FOR HER FINAL STEP.

DO NOT GLOAT YET, HELLSPAWN. YOUR ***PATHETIC*** ENERGY STREAM WASN'T NEARLY STRONG ENOUGH.

YOU'VE FAILED ONCE AGAIN.

WHY DO YOU JUST STAND THERE?

SURELY YOU HAVEN'T SURRENDERED. SO-- WHAT NEW TRICK AWAITS ME ***NOW***?

*THE "DISPERSAL": WHEN HELL'S OFFSPRING PASSES OFF THE **PHYSICAL** END OF BATTLE...*

...TO THOSE THAT HEED THE BEACON'S SIREN CALL...

...THOSE EAGER TO CAST OUT ANY WHO SERVE THE LIGHT!

ANY WHO SERVE THE WILL OF GOD.

HRRR

HRNH!

SQUEE

SQUEE

SSS

KCHNK!

IT TAKES BUT MINUTES FOR THE 'CLEANSING' TO DRAW TO AN END--

-- THE GOAL ACHIEVED:

THE INTRUDER HAS BEEN **BANISHED.**

THE NIGHTBEASTS, THEIR MISSION FULFILLED, WANDER AWAY. NIGHT RESUMES ITS NATURAL BALANCE.

THIS IS INSANE.

HIS CLOAK WHIPS INTO THE COOL AIR, PROCLAIMING **VICTORY** WITH ITS DANCE.

SOUNDS GOOD.

NOW LET'S CHECK THOSE EARS.

OPEN UP. A BIT WIDER.

OKAY. THANK YOU, WANDA.

WELL, I DON'T SEE ANYTHING UNUSUAL. YOU DO HAVE A BIT OF STREP THROAT AND A MINOR VIRAL INFECTION, BUT OTHERWISE YOU'RE STRONG AS EVER. I'LL WRITE YOU OUT A PRESCRIPTION-- YOU'LL CLEAR UP IN A FEW DAYS.

SAY, HOW'S TERRY BEEN LATELY? YOU ***KNOW*** THAT HUSBAND OF YOURS DOESN'T GET IN HERE FOR HIS REGULAR CHECK-UPS. HOPE HE'S NOT PUSHING HIMSELF TOO HARD.

THINGS ***ARE*** PRETTY HECTIC FOR HIM RIGHT NOW.

I'LL PASS THE MESSAGE ALONG, DOCTOR BUSINO.

"UNFORTUNATELY, I THINK I'VE PASSED MY COUGH ON TO HIM."

KOFF KOFF

I SWEAR THESE LATE NIGHTS ARE GOING TO KILL ME YET.

AT LEAST I'M MAKING SOME HEADWAY.

ONE MORE THING TO TRACK... A PARTICULAR DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ARMS SHIPMENT. IT'LL LIST THE RECIPIENT NATIONS... AND TELL ME BY DEFAULT WHO *SHOULDN'T* HAVE THAT HARDWARE.

THEN, WITH A CROSS-CHECK ON NATO SATELLITE DATA, I'LL FIND IF ANYONE'S BEING CARELESS HIDING THEIR NEW TOYS.

CROSS-CHECKING THAT AGAINST OUR INTERNAL TRAVEL LOGS AND WHAT OUR CONTACTS AMONG THE ARMS MERCHANTS HAVE HEARD SHOULD POINT TO *SOMEONE* AT THIS OFFICE WHO'S SET UP A LITTLE BUSINESS ON THE SIDE.

LIKE WYNN. HE'S...

KOFF KOFF KOFF Hack KOFF KF

UGGH! I FEEL LIKE CRAP. . . .

TERRY FITZGERALD WILL SOON WISH HE'D LISTENED TO HIS BODY.

HIS ALLEYS. HE'S COME BACK TO THEM. AGAIN.

HE CAN'T QUITE REMEMBER HOW LONG HE'S BEEN GONE. AWHILE. THAT'S ALL HE KNOWS. IT HAS BEEN AWHILE.

FOLLOWING HIS CAPTURE BY THE CURSE, AND HIS TRAVELS ACROSS FOUR STATES, HE HAS RETURNED HOME.

ALL THIS MADNESS. THIS INSANITY. IT MUST BE SLOWED, HE THINKS.

IT'S TIME TO BE HOME, IN THE FURTHEST REACHES OF 'RAT CITY.'

A REMINDER OF HIS ABDUCTION GREETS HIS RETURN.

POLICE CHIEF MITTS SUICIDES

YOU CAN'T RUN FROM IT, AL.

COG!

IT'S PART OF YOUR LIFE NOW. IT WON'T GO AWAY.

STILL, IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK.

THESE REAR WALLS... THIS **PLACE**... IT'S ALL I HAVE, NOW.

EVERYTHING ELSE IS OUT OF CONTROL. ESPECIALLY MY COSTUME. IT'S TAKEN OVER-- TAKEN **ME** OVER.

THEN WRESTLE IT BACK. ASSERT YOUR POWERS.

WHAT THE **HELL** DO YOU **THINK** I'VE BEEN DOING?!

LOSING YOUR ***GRIP***. YOUR UNIFORM NEEDS YOU AS MUCH AS YOU NEED ***IT***. THE BOND CAN'T BE BROKEN... ONLY ***REFORMED***.

YOUR SYMBIOTE IS ***MORPHING***, AL. FASTER THAN IT SHOULD. YOU HAVE TO ***SLOW*** THE ACCELERATION. HARNESS ITS ENERGY. THEN FIGHT TO BECOME THE WARRIOR YOU ***NEED*** TO BE.

BUT WHY'S THE COSTUME **DOING** THIS?

SOMETHING MUST HAVE TRAUMATIZED IT. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU WERE GONE?

WE WERE SEPARATED. THE CURSE TOOK US **APART**.

AND YOUR OTHER BATTLES?

I... I KILLED AN ANGEL. WELL, NO. IT WAS THE COSTUME. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.

NOT THAT I TRIED TO FIGHT IT. THE ANGEL HAD IT COMING TO HER. HEAVEN SEEMS TO HAVE A PISSY ATTITUDE ABOUT SPAWNS.

THEIR HISTORY WITH GOD HASN'T BEEN VERY BENIGN.

MY BODY'S ALMOST HEALED NOW. EVERYTHING IS REATTACHED. HOPEFULLY, THE COSTUME WILL LET ME TAKE CHARGE NOW.

NO. IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.

THAT'S OBVIOUS.

YOUR OUTER SHELL HAS ADVANCED *TOO FAR* TO RELINQUISH CONTROL. IT CRAVES *EVIL* -- YEARNS TO BE IN ITS PRESENCE. THAT'S HOW IT FEEDS -- HOW IT *LIVES*.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO NOW IS *TRAIN* IT. BECOME ITS *MASTER*. DO YOU UNDERSTAND? *NOT* ITS HOST. ITS ***MASTER***.

YOU HAVE TO HAVE CONTROL.

AND IF I DON'T?

THEN GOD HELP US ALL.

HOURS PASS IN SILENCE, AND AT LAST AL SIMMONS' MIND ACHIEVES THE EQUIVALENT OF SLEEP.

THEN IT MOVES... THE COSTUME...

...CAREFUL NOT TO WAKE ITS HOST-- TRYING TO FIND THE IDEAL SPOT.

A PLACE WHERE IT CAN GROW.

MULTIPLY.

THRIVE.

THEN THE LIVING CARAPACE SETTLES BACK DOWN, CONTENT TO HAVE FOUND A HOME FOR HIS WORMS. HIS CARRIERS.

HIS EVIL.

image

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SPAWN

T. DANIEL
KEVIN CONRAD
T. BOCKEL

BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN.

... IT WAS SO CUTE. SHE EVEN STAYED IN HER MESS LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO GET THE CAMERA.

HA- HA-HA...

... THAT'S GREAT YOU GOT A PICTURE OF IT. I'M SURE YOUR PARENTS WILL LOVE IT!

NO ONE! NOW GO SIT DOWN. I CAN TAKE CARE OF THIS.

WELL, YOU KNOW MOM. SHE'LL THINK SUZY IS TOO RAMBUNCTIOUS OR SOMETHING. BUT DAD'LL GET A BIG KICK OUT OF IT.

Ding-dong

I'LL GET IT!!

WHY? WHO IS IT?

'EVENING, JOHNNY. MR. GRAVANO WANTS TO HAVE A LITTLE *MEETING* WITH YOU. SAYS I SHOULD ARRANGE IT... WITH *YOUR* PERMISSION, OF COURSE.

HE'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT WORK HABITS.

LOOK, BOYS. THERE'S BEEN A MISTAKE. I CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING.

GOOD.

IT'S JUST THAT I'M *BUSY* RIGHT NOW. WITH THE NEW BABY AND ALL. YOU UNDERSTAND.

VERY DISAPPOINTED.

I DO. TOO BAD, THOUGH. MR. GRAVANO WILL BE DISAPPOINTED.

OKAY. BUT NOT HERE. NOT IN FRONT OF MY WIFE AND KID.

JOHN? WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?

Um... JUST A SMALL PROBLEM AT WORK. NOTHING, REALLY. I NEED TO... uh... GET BACK TO THE OFFICE. SETTLE A FEW THINGS.

I'LL BE HOME LATE.

DO ME A FAVOR. TELL SUZY HOW MUCH I LOVE HER BEFORE YOU TUCK HER IN.

OF COURSE. WHEN WILL YOU BE BACK?

I'M NOT SURE. BUT DON'T WAIT UP. GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

Oh... ONE MORE THING. YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT.

LET'S GO.

JOHN...?

THAT'S A LOVELY WIFE YOU HAVE. YOU'RE A LUCKY MAN.

THANKS.

HELLO, JOHNNY. I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU'D SIT IN THE FRONT.

YEAH, SURE, MR. BREWI.

A MINUTE PASSES.

WHY'RE WE JUST SITTING HERE?

JOHNNY TORRENZO'S WIFE RUSHES OUTSIDE. SHE'S HEARD THE SOUND BEFORE -- KNOWS ITS MEANING.

IT'LL BE A FULL TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE THE NEIGHBORS CALM HER HYSTERICS. ANOTHER HOUR BEFORE SHE STOPS CRYING.

THE POLICE WON'T BE GIVEN ENOUGH INFORMATION TO DO THEM ANY GOOD.

AND THE BLOOD-SOAKED SIDEWALK WILL EVENTUALLY FADE BUT NEVER QUITE LOSE ITS STAIN.

SLAM

WE'VE DONE THAT ERRAND FOR YOU, MR. GRAVANO... LEFT THE BODY RIGHT WHERE YOU SAID. AT THE HOME.

PERFECT. THE OTHERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WILL GET MY SUBTLE MESSAGE. JOHNNY WAS WAY TOO ***STUPID*** TO BE STEALING FROM ME ON HIS OWN. HE HAD HELP--AND MOST OF HIS GROUP LIVES IN THAT AREA.

NOW THEY KNOW I'M WATCHING... AND SOMEONE ***ALWAYS*** PANICS.

I WANT YOU TO BE THERE WHEN THEY *DO*. JOHNNY'S NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS FALL ALL BY HIMSELF.

YES, SIR.

IT'S A PITY, REALLY. I HAD SUCH HOPES FOR JOHNNY. STILL, WE ALL HAVE OUR OBLIGATIONS. HE ***FORGOT*** HIS.

LOOK AFTER THE PROPER ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIS FUNERAL-- AND EXPRESS MY CONDOLENCES TO HIS WIFE.

LET HER KNOW THAT SHE AND THE BABY WILL BE WELL TAKEN CARE OF. I ALWAYS PROVIDE FOR MY 'FAMILY.'

RINGG

YES?

*I AM PHONING ON BEHALF OF MR. BARTINO. HE HAS ASKED ME TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU WERE TO HAVE RETURNED HIS **PROPERTY** BY NOW.*

*MR. BARTINO DOES NOT APPRECIATE **TARDINESS**, AS I'M SURE YOU ARE AWARE.*

*YOU SEE, MR. GRAVANO, IN SICILY HAVE OUR OWN CODE OF HONOR... ONE WHICH DOES NOT TEMPT THE FATES. WE EXPECT THE PROMPT RETURN OF **OVERTKILL**. DO NOT DISAPPOINT US. GOODBYE.*

EVERY DEVIL HAS ITS MASTER. VITO GRAVANO HAS JUST BEEN REMINDED THAT HE IS NO EXCEPTION.

THEY'D BEEN BROUGHT TO THE REEKING ALLEYWAY FOR A PURPOSE:

TO GIVE HIM **STRENGTH.** TO ACT AS A CATALYST, INDUCING THE FREE FLOW OF **BLACK ENERGY** TO AID IN HIS RECOVERY.

BUT FIRST, THEY MUST **MULTIPLY.** THEIR NUMBERS MUST **THRIVE** IN THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT. THAT WILL TAKE TIME.

SO, FOR THE MOMENT, THEY ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THEIR SURROUND-INGS--

-- NOTHING MORE THAN **FOOD** TO THE CREATURES THEY'LL SOON **OUTRANK**--

-- PHYSICAL NOURISH-MENT RATHER THAN POWERFUL MYSTIC CONDUITS.

SOON, THOUGH. VERY SOON, IT WILL BE UNDERSTOOD-- THEY MUST BE SHOWN **RESPECT.** THEY HAVE A **MASTER.**

OVER TWO HUNDRED MILES THE LIVING COSTUME HAD CARRIED THEM, HIDDEN IN THE FOLDS OF ITS BLOOD-RED CLOAK, EVER CAREFUL TO CRADLE THEM IN A BED OF DARK, RICH SOIL.

THEY CARRY A RESOURCE **ESSENTIAL** TO ITS CONTINUED EXISTENCE...

... AND THAT OF ITS **HOST**, THE LATE LIEUTENANT-COLONEL AL SIMMONS:

EVIL. THE WORMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE SPONGES FOR IT. DWELLING UNDER-GROUND, HIDDEN FROM GOD'S LIGHT, THEY ABSORB THE AURA OF WICKEDNESS.

IN THESE GENTLE BURROWERS, THE DEVIL FOUND A BACK-DOOR INTO GOD'S CREATION. THEY DRAW NOURISHMENT FROM THE SOIL ALONE-- THEY HAVE NO USE FOR THE SUN--

-- SO THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN **TAINTED.**

THEY ARE, IN EFFECT, **BOTTLED SIN.**

HEY, LARRY! LOOK--

--ITS... ITS--

OH HOLY MOTHER!!

RUN!!

THE MASTER OF THE NIGHT-CRAWLERS FEEDS **CONTINUALLY** NOW, SLOWLY DRAINING EACH WORM OF ITS DARK NECTAR.

THE HELLSPAWN-- WHICH IS TO SAY, HIS OUTER SHELL-- IS REBUILDING STRENGTH LOST AS A RESULT OF THEIR BRUTAL **SEPARATION**. *

* ISSUE 40 -- Tom.

AT THE SAME TIME, AT THE CORE OF THEIR UNION, HOST AND **SYMBIOTE** ARE IN A STRUGGLE FOR **SUPREMACY**.

IT'S **THAT** CONDITION WHICH INTERESTS ANOTHER OF THE ALLEY'S RESIDENTS.

QUEENS, NEW YORK... THE HOME OF AL'S WIDOW...

WELL, ACCORDING TO THIS, EVERY-THING SHOULD BE APPROVED BY NEXT WEEK.

WE'LL HAVE THE FINAL PERMITS IN HAND, ALLOWING US TO START BUILDING THE CHILDRENS' WING. I CAN'T BELIEVE IT-- AFTER ALL THIS TIME, IT'S ACTUALLY GOING TO *HAPPEN!*

IT'LL MEAN *SO MUCH* TO THE HOSPITAL-- NOT TO MENTION OUR *VOLUNTEERS*. I THINK A FEW PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO *DOUBT*...

DADT! DAD! DA-DA!

I'M SORRY, SWEETIE. DADDY WON'T BE HOME FOR A WHILE.

WRONG.

I STILL FEEL LIKE CRAP. CAN'T SEEM TO SHAKE THIS FLU.

DR. BUSCINO KEEPS ASKING YOU TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT.

TERRY?! WHY ARE YOU HERE?

I KNOW, I KNOW. I JUST HAVEN'T HAD THE TIME.

DAD-DA! DAD-DA! DAD-DA!

I'LL TRY FOR NEXT WEEK.

HEY, CYAN! HOW'S MY LITTLE GIRL? YOU BEING GOOD FOR YOUR MOM?

YESH.

GOOD. NOW HOW 'BOUT A HELICOPTER RIDE BEFORE I LIE DOWN.

'COPTER! 'COPTER!

ANY MORE NEWS ON YOUR PERMITS?

EVERY-THING'S SET. THE CONTRACTOR BEGINS IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS.

AND YOU *STILL* DON'T HAVE A CLUE WHO GAVE THAT BIG DONATION.

NOPE. I GUESS SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST SHY.

AFTER A FEW MINUTES OF PLAYTIME, TERRY RETIRES TO THE BEDROOM. HE'S BEEN HIDING HIS SICKNESS QUITE WELL.

KOFF KOFF KOFF HACK

OH, MAN...

A FEW NIGHTS LATER.

HIS NAME IS CHRIS PRONGER, BUT THOSE WHO KNOW HIM USE A DIFFERENT NAME:

'ORCA.'

Jimmy's SPORTS BAR AND GRILL

SEE YA 'ROUND, EDDIE.

HE FOLLOWS ORDERS WITH SKILL AND PRECISION.

HE NEVER LEAVES ANY LOOSE ENDS.

BUILT LIKE A **WHALE** AND ONE HELL OF A **KILLER.**

KILLER WHALE. ORCA. GET IT?

PLENTY OF **VICTIMS** HAVE. THAT'S WHY HE'S BECOME SO VALUABLE TO VITO GRAVANO.

HE'S LONG SINCE LOST TRACK OF THE BODY COUNT.

HIS 'HIT' ON JOHNNY PASQUALI WAS JUST ANOTHER GIG.

WHA...?

WHATEVER THE NUMBER, IT'S JUST BEEN **CAPPED.**

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING...

DON'T LIE TO ME, YOU LITTLE *PUKE!* I'M GETTING *TIRED* OF ALL THESE STUPID EXCUSES!

PLEASE... I SWEAR... I DON'T HAVE YOUR MONEY. N-NOT TODAY... I GET TOMORROW.

YOU FRIGGIN' LIAR! I'LL GET IT MYSELF. WHERE *IS* IT? IN THE BACK ROOM?

SOMETHING *WEIRD* GOING ON HERE. MR. GARBONE *ALWAYS* PAYS HIS 'PROTECTION' BILL. NICE AND QUIET, LIKE. NEVER A PROBLEM.

MR. GRAVANO AIN'T GOING TO LIKE IT IF SOME-ONE'S TRYING TO SQUEEZE INTO HIS TURF.

GRRRRR

Uh?

WHAT NOW? SOME GODDAMN DOG?

NO.

I WANT HIM DEAD!! DO YOU HEAR ME?! FIND OUT WHO HE IS AND KILL HIM!

VITO GRAVANO

THIS SIDE UP

VERY FRAGILE

AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT TOMORROW OR NEXT WEEK. I WANT THIS SONOFABITCH GUTTED TONIGHT!

BAM!

SOMEONE'S JUST STARTED A WAR. FIND OUT WHO HE WORKS FOR BECAUSE I PLAN TO OBLITERATE HIS ASS.

NO ONE TOUCHES MY BOYS AND LIVES TO TELL ABOUT IT.

NOW DISPOSE OF THAT BOX AND WHEN YOU'RE DONE TELL VINNIE I'M SHORT ON PROTECTION. GET HIM TO COLLECT A FEW RESUMES.

YES, SIR.

"HOW DO YOU *KNOW* SHE WAS DEAD?"

"BELIEVE ME, **SHE WAS DEAD**. THE ANIMALS STRIPPED HER BONES OF PRACTICALLY ALL FLESH. SHE'S GONE."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, '*HER BONES*'?"

HER SKELETON. IT WAS STREWN ALL OVER THE PLACE.

YOU ***STILL*** DON'T GET IT, DO YOU? YOU DIDN'T KILL ANY ANGEL.* SHE'S STILL ALIVE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

ANGELS DON'T *HAVE* BONES. THEY'RE LIKE *YOU*-- MADE OF SOME KIND OF *PLASM*. THE ONLY WAY TO VANQUISH ONE OF THEM IS TO ABSORB THEIR *LIGHT*, WHICH YOU DIDN'T DO. WHAT'S WORSE, SHE COULD BE ANYWHERE. YOU SEE, THEY SHAPE-SHIFT. AND BECAUSE OF YOUR NECROPLASM'S EMISSIONS, SHE CAN FIND YOU IN A *HEARTBEAT*.

MAYBE SHE'S ALREADY HERE WAITING FOR YOU. AS A BUM. A HOOKER. A DOG. ANYTHING. AND YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT.

SO NOW WHAT?

Oh, FOR THE *LOVE* OF *PETE!!* *LEARN*, DAMMIT, YOU'RE A *SPAWN* NOW. AS MUCH AS YOU'D LIKE TO BE HUMAN AGAIN, THAT'S *LONG* GONE. PEOPLE, CREATURES, THINGS, HEAVEN ITSELF -- THEY'RE *ALL* GUNNING FOR YOU. IF ONE FAILS, ANOTHER PICKS UP THE SLACK.

BUT YOU KEEP THINKING SMALL. IGNORING THE SIGNS. YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A *GAME*, AL, ONE YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY CONTROL. HEAVEN, HELL-- *THEY* RUN THE SHOW. US ON EARTH, WE'RE JUST THE MIDDLEMEN.

SO WHAT'S THE POINT?

TO FIGHT FOR WHAT'S *RIGHT!!* THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE -- BECAUSE YOU FOUGHT TO RETURN TO YOUR WIFE. BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED.

THAT'S WHAT'S RIGHT!

WHAT ABOUT THE REST? TERRY. VIOLATOR. ANGELA. EVEN JASON WYNN -- WHO, YOU SAID, MIGHT NOT BE THE ONE WHO ORDERED MY DEATH. WHAT ARE THEY?

PIECES TO THE PUZZLE. YOU CAN'T DETERMINE WHAT TO FIGHT FOR UNLESS YOU HAVE ANSWERS. EACH OF THEM CAN PROVIDE YOU SOME.

LISTEN, COG, EVERY TIME I TRY AND CATCH MY BREATH, SOMETHING NEW'S ATTACKING. I'M A MAN, THOUGH YOU CAN TELL ME OTHERWISE. WELL, THAT'S ALL I HAVE LEFT, AND IF I STOP BELIEVING THAT, I SWEAR I'LL CRACK.

THEN DON'T.

IN THE MEANTIME, FIGHT. FIGHT *ALL* OF THIS. BUT REMEMBER THERE IS A REPERCUSSION TO YOUR EVERY ACTION. YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN HOW QUICKLY EVENTS CAN SPIN OUT OF CONTROL.

THAT'S WHAT HELL WANTS. FOR YOU TO BE CONFUSED. ANGRY. *VICIOUS*. TO ACT ON *INSTINCT*.

SO FAR, YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING RIGHT INTO THE DEVIL'S HANDS.

LIKE THESE *WORMS*. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FOR?

TO SIPHON EVIL! *THAT'S* WHAT YOUR COSTUME'S DOING.

I-- I **NEED** THEM.

YES, YOU DO-- BUT NOT *THIS* WAY. NOT WHILE YOUR UNIFORM IS CALLING THE SHOTS.

YOU WANT TO BE A MAN. THEN OPEN YOUR EYES AND *LEARN*.

"INTERESTING"? IS THAT SUPPOSED TO BE A COMPLI-MENT, VINNIE?

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEANT. IT'S JUST THAT I'VE NEVER HAD TWO AT THE SAME TIME. YOU AND MARILYN ARE SOMETHING SPECIAL.

I ABOUT HAD A HEART ATTACK.

WE'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN.

HOTEL NO VACANCY

WHEW

NOW *THAT* WAS INTERESTING.

HEY--?! WHERE YOU GOING?

GOTTA TAKE A DUMP.

HOW ROMANTIC.

uh--? WHAT'S THAT NOISE? SOUNDS LIKE THE PORCELIN IS CRACKING.

I DIDN'T *FART* THAT LOUD, DID I?

PIPES SNAP. BRICK AND MORTAR EXPLODE.

SKRAASH!

VINNIE IS BARELY ABLE TO COVER HIS EYES BEFORE BEING SUCKED OUTWARD.

BEFORE THE DUST SETTLES, HE HEARS IT. THE **MONSTER**. ITS LOW GROWLS. LIKE SOME RAGING BULL. THEN HE FEELS ITS **BREATH** ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK.

HE'S NOT SURE HE SHOULD LOOK UP, BECAUSE WHATEVER HORROR IT IS HOVERING OVER HIM DOESN'T SMELL EVEN **REMOTELY** HUMAN.

MAKE ONE SOUND AND I'LL SKIN YOU WHERE YOU STAND.

VINNIE BOLBANI BITES HIS LIPS SO HARD THEY BLEED.

WORD IS YOU HAVE THE INFORMATION I'M LOOKING FOR.

ALMOST TO THE POINT OF SCREAMING, HE CATCHES HIMSELF-- AND INSTEAD DEPOSITS ANOTHER 'PARCEL' IN THE TOILET BOWL.

LATER...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE GOOD OL' DAYS WHEN THE WORD *RESPECT* ACTUALLY MEANT SOME-THING?

WHAT A DAY.

NO MOVING IN ON SOME-ONE ELSE'S TERRITORY. NO STEALING FROM THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU. RULES WERE MEANT TO BE FOLLOWED. BUT I GUESS...

HELLO, VITO.

JEEZ-US.

LONG TIME, NO SEE.

DON'T BOTHER ASKING HOW I FOUND YOU. I HAD HELP FROM ONE OF YOUR LOYAL RATS.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN A MAN WOULD SOONER DIE THAN BETRAY YOU.

YOUR HELP'S GETTING SOFT.

VINNIE! YOU TRAITOR!

VITO, I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.

HE'S RIGHT. HE DIDN'T.

SEE, THREATS AND TORTURE CAN BE VERY COMPELLING. YOU REMEMBER THAT, DON'T YOU, VITO?

HOW YOU GOT TO ME BY THREATENING MY FAMILY. YOU AND YOUR DAMN SCIENTISTS, TRYING TO BUILD YOUR 'PERFECT HITMAN.'

AND EVEN AFTER YOU HAD ME. EVEN AFTER I SAID I'D DO IT, YOU KILLED THEM! MY WIFE. MY KIDS. EVERYONE, JUST SO YOU COULD PROTECT YOUR ASS.

WELL, NOW IT'S PAY-BACK!!

NOT *QUITE*, RICHARD. I KNEW YOU'D RETURN SOME-DAY, SO I PLANNED AHEAD. YOUR BROTHER DAVID-- HE'S *STILL ALIVE* AND I KNOW WHERE HE IS...

... *AND*, BETTER YET, HE'S TO BE SLAUGHTERED IF ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY WERE TO HAPPEN TO ME.

KRAK!

LIKE A CREATURE MAULING MEE*EUMPH!*

LIAR! DAVID'S DEAD.

EVEN WHEN YOU WORKED FOR ME I KNEW YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE *BACKBONE*.

I SAID SHUT UP!!

WHOOO...

YOU'RE A *FAILURE*, RICHARD! YOU COULDN'T DO YOUR *JOB*, OR PROTECT YOUR *FAMILY*... YOU EVEN SCREWED UP OUR *EXPERIMENT*!

THIS ISN'T OVER, VITO. I'LL BE BACK.

HA HA HA HA HA HA

*THE CREATURE KNOWN AS TREMOR LEAVES. NOT BECAUSE HE'S AFRAID, BUT BECAUSE HE **KNOWS** VITO. HOW HE **WORKS**. HE WOULDN'T LIE ABOUT DAVID BEING STILL ALIVE.*

SO HE NEEDS TIME TO THINK. TO PLAN. BEFORE COMING BACK FOR VITO.

VINNIE IS GOING TO HELP HIM.

OH, GOD. OH, GOD. OH, GOD.

BOSS, WHY'D YOU LET HIM GO?

BECAUSE, GENTLEMEN, WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR HIS *RETURN*. I NEED HIM BACK IN *ONE PIECE*.

SICILY IS LOOKING TO GET OVERTKILL BACK. WELL, WITH A FEW SMALL ADJUSTMENTS, I'LL BE ABLE TO DELIVER A *BRAND NEW* VERSION.

ONE DEVOID OF ANY HUMAN BRAIN.

Oh, GOD. Oh, GOD.

SPAWN, I NEED HELP. YOURS.

QUIET! VITO IS MY PROBLEM, I KNOW, BUT I THOUGHT YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN HEARING A FEW NAMES FROM VINNIE HERE. HE'S A FOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE.

WHAT WERE THOSE NAMES AGAIN, VINNIE?

WHERE DO YOU GET OFF...?!

WANDA BLAKE. TERRY FITZGERALD. CYAN FITZGERALD. JASON WYNN.

THAT'S ENOUGH.

SO WHAT DO YOU SAY NOW... PARTNER.

image

47 APR

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NAMES.

THAT'S ALL HE HAD. NO DETAILS. JUST NAMES.

HE'D HEARD THEM ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO. BUT THAT'S ALL THEY WERE TO HIM, NAMES. AS HEAD OF VITO GRAVANO'S PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT, VINNIE ONLY ASSIGNED MEN AS NEEDED FOR EACH SURVEILLANCE. BEYOND THAT, HE WAS OUT OF THE LOOP.

STILL, THE LIST WAS QUITE CONCISE: TERRY FITZGERALD... WANDA BLAKE... CYAN FITZGERALD... JASON WYNN.

TREMOR HAD HOPED THEY WOULD BE ENOUGH WHEN VINNIE RATTLED THEM OFF TO SPAWN. ENOUGH TO ENLIST SPAWN'S HELP IN A BATTLE AGAINST MAFIA DON VITO GRAVANO.

BUT THE ENIGMATIC HERO WANTED DETAILS. SO HE 'PURSUADED' VINNIE TO IDENTIFY THE THUG IN CHARGE OF THAT PARTICULAR SURVEILLANCE.

THEN, HE ORDERED TREMOR TO FIND THE MAN, ONE BILLY SCAMBINO.

SPAWN NEEDED TO 'TALK' WITH BILLY.

ENRAGED, TREMOR THEN LEFT.

HERE HE IS!

AND THIS ONE **DOES** HAVE ALL YOUR ANSWERS. BUT I'M WARNING YOU, IF YOU CHOOSE TO IGNORE ANY OF THIS, I'LL MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS WHERE YOU CAN BE FOUND.

LISTEN, SMARTASS. THE MAFIA HAS AN ARMY OF GRUNTS THAT'LL CLOG THESE ALLEYS SO TIGHT YOU WON'T HAVE A CHANCE TO BREATHE.

THAT'S NOT COUNTING WHAT I'M PLANNING ON DOING TO YOU.

A CROOKED SMIRK CUTS ACROSS SPAWN'S DISFIGURED FACE.

OH, REALLY.

SO? YOU GOING TO HELP ME OR WHAT?

YAAH!

FIRST, GET OUT OF MY FACE. I DON'T TAKE VERY KINDLY TO THREATS.

FINE. BUT HE'S THE LAST, YOU UNDERSTAND. THEN, I WANT YOUR ANSWER.

I DIDN'T THINK THIS WAS GOING TO TO TURN INTO SOME GODDAMNED ORDEAL.

THERE ISN'T TIME FOR THAT.

THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO FIND SOME.

SO? WHAT'D YOU DO WITH VINNIE?

Oh, HE'S BEEN TAKEN CARE OF, BELIEVE ME.

IT'S OUR NEW PAL I WANT YOU TO FOCUS ON, NOW.

HELLO, BILLY.

Oh, GOD.

DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE?

PLEASE, I - I DIDN'T DO...

AA!

SILENCE! YOU'VE GOT EXACTLY THREE SECONDS TO GATHER YOUR WITS -- OR ELSE I'M GOING TO RIP OUT YOUR LIVER AND FEED IT TO TREMOR, HERE.

→gulp←

VINNIE GAVE ME THE GIG A FEW MONTHS BACK. KEEP AN EYE ON THIS DUDE TERRY, AND HIS WIFE AND KID. SOMETHING ABOUT HIM BEING ***YOU***. BUT HE WASN'T.

THINGS GOT A BIT MESSY FOR AWHILE, THOUGH.* VITO STILL BELIEVES THE GUY'S CONNECTED TO YOU SOMEHOW. ANOTHER TEAM STILL FOLLOWS HIM.

I ***SWEAR*** THAT'S IT.

I DOUBT IT. WHAT ABOUT JASON WYNN?

* ISSUES 21 TO 25 -- Tom.

DON'T KNOW HIM, BUT I THINK HE'S THE ONE FEEDING GRAVANO HIS INFOOOOOO

THANK YOU.

NOW TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THOSE NAMES.

OF COURSE. YEAH. SURE.

THAT'S ENOUGH! YOU WANT ANY MORE FROM HIM, GET IT LATER. I NEED THAT ***ANSWER*** NOW.

CAN I COUNT ON YOUR HELP?

CRAVING GRAVANO'S ANSWERS TO YET OTHER QUESTIONS, SPAWN DECIDES.

FOR TONIGHT.

...AND WHEN I HEARD ABOUT YOUR PAL *CHIEF BANKS*, I ABOUT PISSED MYSELF. VENTILATING HIS *OWN HEAD** HEE HEE WHAT A KOOK!

*ISSUE 45--Tom.

I *MEAN*-- SELF-MUTI*LA*TION?! THAT'S A BIG, *BIG* COMMITTMENT. A FELLA'S GOTTA FEEL *PRET*TY LONELY TO CHOOSE ETERNAL DAMNATION. THE *BIG GUY* UPSTAIRS, HE'S NOT MUCH *INTO* SOULS WITH SUICIDAL TENDENCIES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, MY EX-BOSS, *WELL!* HE'S A *VERY* FORGIVIN' KINDA DUDE.

THIP

THAT'S *IF* HE MAKES IT TO MALEBOLGIA'S LEVEL.

WRR

AN' YOU WANNA HEAR THE *FUNNIEST* PART? GOOD OL' BANKS DIDN'T EVEN LEAVE A MESS ON THE WALL. KNOW *WHY?*

'CAUSE HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY *BRAINS!* HA HEE HEE HO HO HO! GET IT?! HE TRIED TO BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT BUT HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE... HEE HEE HEE-HEE!

IS THERE A POINT TO ANY OF THIS?

Oh, I THINK I'M GONNA FART--!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, JASON? CAN'T LAUGH AT YOUR *OWN* SKULL-DUGGERY?

HERE'S THE *POINT!* *SPAWN'S* BACK IN TOWN. EVEN YOUR OWN MEN DON'T KNOW IT YET.

HE'S RETURNED TO THE ALLEYWAYS. HE HAS TO--OR AT LEAST HIS *SYMBIOTE* DOES. IT'S NO ACCIDENT MALEBOLGIA DUMPED HIM IN THAT FILTH. BUT *THAT'S* ANOTHER STORY.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT HE'S WEAK. *VULNERABLE.*

THAT'S WHERE *YOU* COME IN.

HIS COSTUME IS MORPHING, *ALREADY.* THAT SHOULDN'T BE HAPPENING... WHICH IS GOOD FOR *US.* *NOW* ALL'S WE HAVE TO DO IS TRIGGER IT SOMEHOW, THEN...

POOF! RIGHT *BACK* TO HELL HE GOES!

HEE-HEE-HOOEE HEOOOWW!

'SCUSE ME, I'M A BIT EXCITED.

*ANY*HOW, WE NEED HIM TO LOSE CONTROL SOME WAY-- OR BETTER YET, TO SPILL A BUNCH OF *POWER!* *THAT'D* REALLY POP HIS BUBBLE! Oh, THIS IS GONNA BE *GREAT!!*

SO WHAT'YA SAY?

DO I HAVE A CHOICE?

NOT REALLY. I'M JUST HUMORING YOU.

THEN I'M IN. BUT LET ME ASK A QUESTION. WITH YOUR POWERS, WHY NOT DO IT ON YOUR OWN?

Wow! ARE YOU EVER *DENSE!*

LET ME SHARE SOMETHING WITH YOU, WYNN.

IN A STRAIGHT ONE-ON-ONE FIGHT, I'D CLEAN THE GUY'S *CLOCK.* BUT THAT WON'T GET ME WHAT I WANT.

WHICH IS--?

ACKNOWLEDG-MENT FROM MY FORMER *BOSS.* SEE, HE SEEMS TO THINK THAT *HUMANS* HAVE A BETTER CHANCE AT LEADING US INTO THE 'FINAL WAR'!

INTELLIGENCE. SAVVY. CUNNING. HE USES A BUNCH OF FANCY WORDS TO SOFTEN THE BLOW, BUT IT BOILS DOWN TO THE SAME THING: HE THINKS THESE HUMANS'RE SMARTER THAN US... HIS OWN CHILDREN.

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THAT CAN GIVE A GUY A COMPLEX.

SO... POUNDING SPAWN INTO DOGFOOD AIN'T GOING TO CUT IT, NO SIREE!

HAVE TO SHOW MALEBOLGIA THAT I CAN BEAT THEM WITH BRAINS, NOT BRAWN. SCREW WITH THEM. TRIP 'EM UP SOMEHOW. AN' MAYBE IF IT HAPPENS ENOUGH TIMES HE'LL SEE WHO THE TRUE LEADERS ARE:

US! THOSE OF US BORN IN HELL. NOT THOSE SENT THERE. SEE, I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF STINKING FOREIGNERS TAKING OUR JOBS!

HELL WAS BUILT ON OUR SWEAT AND BLOOD. WE DESERVE TO BE THE OFFICERS!-- THE GENERALS!-- FOR THE GREAT WAR, NOT THEM! IT MAKES ME WANNA PUKE!

URP!

UH-oh, HERE IT COMES.

THAT'S FASCINATING.

DON'T BE SO SMUG, WYNN.

YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'LL SOLVE MY PROBLEMS: POWER. I KNOW YOU LUST FOR IT, TOO, SO STOP ACTING LIKE I'M SOME WEIRDO, 'CAUSE I LOOK AT YOUR PICTURE EVERY NIGHT FOR INSPIRATION.

LET'S GET SOMETHING STRAIGHT, CLOWN.

I'VE SET EVENTS IN MOTION THAT'LL TUMBLE LIKE DOMINOS, GAINING MOMENTUM UNTIL THEY FINALLY HIT OUR TARGET, SPAWN.

MY BIGGEST PROBLEM HASN'T BEEN BELIEVING YOU HAVE THE CAPABILITIES, BUT KNOWING WHEN TO ACTUALLY TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY.

BELIEVE ME, JASON, I'M SERIOUS. ***DEADLY*** SERIOUS.

THOUGH I'VE ***ENJOYED*** MY FREELANCE TIME, HELL'S WHERE I BELONG TOO. NEAR THE ***REAL*** ACTION: ***ARMAGEDDON***. THE ***APOCALYPSE***. CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL. I PLAN ON BEING ON THE WINNING SIDE.

ENDING GOD'S REIGN *FOREVER.*

IT MIGHT TAKE A MILLENNIUM OR TWO TO DO IT. *Sooo*, IN THE MEAN-TIME, WHY NOT HAVE A BIT OF FUN... INSTEAD OF BEING A TIGHTASS LIKE *YOU*, WYNN.

STARTING WITH BUCKWHEAT, HERE.

EXCUSE ME... *OW!* MAY I SAY SOMETHING?

GO AHEAD.

BZZT! OW! BZZT! HEE-HEE! BZZT! OW! BZZT! HEE-HEE!

FIRST TIME IN A LIMO, DR. GALACKAWITZ?

NOT ONE *THIS* SMALL. NOW SHUT UP AND DRIVE.

HE SURVEYS THE INVENTORY INTENTLY.

HERE, IN THE DEEPEST RECESSES OF NEW YORK CITY'S FILTH-LADEN ALLEYS, EXISTS AN AREA EVEN THE HOMELESS RARELY TREAD.

"RAT CITY" IS WHAT THEY CALL IT. NO ONE WANTS TO BE CAUGHT HERE.

BFI

HE'S REGRESSING. BUILDING A BARRICADE.

TRYING TO SHUT HIMSELF AWAY FROM THE WORLD--THE '*LIGHT*'. MAYBE AL'S COSTUME HAS TAKEN OVER FOR GOOD.

IF SO, THERE'S LITTLE HOPE.

FUNNY, I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT FINALLY BE *THE ONE*. GUESS I'M LOSING MY SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE THESE DAYS.

DAMN YOU, MALEBOLGIA.

HOW *MANY* CHILDREN DO YOU NEED FOR YOUR ACCURSED WAR?

A LITTLE PAST 11 P.M. ...

ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW, MR. GRAVANO?

THE GROUNDS HAVE BEEN SECURE FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS, BUT EVERYONE HAS ORDERS TO LET TREMOR SLIP THROUGH. I WANT HIM TO FEEL A FALSE SENSE OF ACCOMPLISH-MENT BEFORE I PULL THE NOOSE TIGHT AROUND HIS NECK.

AM I TO KILL HIM?

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I HAVE OTHER PLANS. YOU SEE, THE CARTEL BACK IN SICILY IS LOOKING FOR THE RETURN OF OVERTKILL. SINCE WE'VE BEEN UNABLE TO LOCATE THEIR MACHINE, I NEED TO BUY SOME TIME.

SO, HE DOESN'T KNOW IT YET, BUT TREMOR'S ABOUT TO *COMPLETE* THE EXPERI-MENT WE STARTED ON HIM YEARS AGO. *

HOW DO YOU KNOW HE'LL RETURN?

BELIEVE ME... I KNOW HIS KIND. THEY'RE SO DAMNED *PREDICTABLE*.

THE ENTIRE PLACE IS COVERED. I'LL KNOW THE *SECOND* HE ARRIVES.

NOT EVERY OPTION HAS BEEN COVERED.

* ISSUE 25 -- Tom

KRACK

IT'S TIME, VITO!

KRA-

YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE HIDDEN MY BROTHER. I WANT THE CITY. THE COUNTRY. EVERYTHING!

AND IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT SCREWING WITH ME, EVEN A LITTLE, STOP AND CONSIDER THIS.

YOU TOOK MY FAMILY FROM ME. I'LL DO THE SAME FOR YOU.

SEE, I KNOW WHERE YOUR EX-WIFE LIVES.

SKRUNCH!

TOUCH HER, YOU'RE *DEAD!*

THEN TELL ME WHERE DAVID IS!

SPOW

GHK

MR. GRAVANO! YOU ALRIGHT?

I'M FINE.

BUT HE CAME HERE, CARRYING ON LIKE I SAID HE WOULD-- MAKING A MOCKERY OF YOUR BROTHER'S MEMORY.

TIME FREEZES FOR TREMOR. WHAT HE SEES CANNOT BE.

DAVID...? IS IT REALLY YOU?!

LISTEN, YOU FREAK. IF YOU'RE TO TRY AND PLAY LIKE YOU'RE MY BROTHER--*FORGET IT!* IT WON'T WORK!

SEE, WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING THIS FOR QUITE SOME TIME... EVER SINCE YOUR ESCAPE OVERSEAS.

I'M JUST GLAD THEY LET ME BE INVOLVED TO...

NOW WHAT?!

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

IT'S MY LITTLE SURPRISE.

BACK-UPS? IS THAT WHAT YOU'VE BROUGHT-- YOUR OWN ARMY?

NO. JUST ONE MORE.

PERFECT! IT SEEMS I'LL BE BAGGING TWO IN ONE NIGHT. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DAVID?

YES, SIR.

DAVID, PLEASE, I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD. AFTER THEY KILLED ANNA-MARIE AND THE BABY, THEY WIPED OUT THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

HOW'D YOU ESCAPE?

SCREW YOU!!

MY BROTHER'S *DEAD* BECAUSE OF YOU. I *SAW* HIS BODY... OR WHAT YOU *LEFT* OF IT.

AND I DIDN'T *ESCAPE*...

...THE MAFIA *RESCUED* ME... GAVE ME A CHANCE TO BIDE MY TIME WHILE I WAITED FOR MY *REVENGE!*

THE WAIT IS OVER. SAY YOUR PRAYERS.

OUTSIDE.

DAVID, PLEASE. IT'S ME, RICHARD!

MY BROTHER'S DEAD!

BLAM BLAM

SPGH

SPAT

SCH

BLAM BLAM BLAM

SCH

SCH

THINKING THEY'VE CORNERED THEIR GHOST, TWIST'S MEN CONVERGE IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT.

TONIGHT, THEY'LL BE TAUGHT THE FIRST LESSON OF THE HELLSPAWN:

YOU CAN'T KILL WHAT IS ALREADY DEAD.

DAVID, DON'T DO THIS.

OR *WHAT*? YOU'LL KILL ME *TOO*? VITO HAS EXPLAINED EVERYTHING.

UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T GET TO KILL YOU. YOU'RE TAKING OVERTKILL'S PLACE.

AND THE SHOOTING OUT-SIDE? IT'S STOPPED. WHATEVER HELP YOU WERE LOOKING FOR HAS JUST BEEN *GREASED*.

I WOULDN'T SAY THAT. NOW DROP THE GUN.

WHO THE CHRIST ARE YOU?

I SAID, DROP THE GUN.

OKAY! OKAY!

YOU'RE MAKING A *BIG* MISTAKE, HERO, BUSTIN' IN HERE LIKE THIS. YOU JUST TOLD ME YOU'VE GOT A *DEATH WISH!*

DO US BOTH A FAVOR, VITO, AND SHUT UP. I'M MAKING THE RULES NOW. THE FIRST IS, I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE TRYING TO KILL MY ASSOCIATES...

...OR HOUNDING INNOCENT PEOPLE.

I'VE ALREADY WARNED YOU ONCE, VITO.* OBVIOUSLY, I DIDN'T MAKE MYSELF CLEAR ENOUGH.

WHEN I SAID LEAVE ME ALONE, THAT INCLUDED THOSE AROUND ME.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE...

*ISSUE 24--Tom.

=tsk tsk= YOU'RE NOT **LISTENING**, VITO. LET'S SEE IF I CAN'T MAKE MYSELF A BIT CLEARER.

ANYONE-- AND I MEAN **ANYONE**-- COMES CLOSE TO WANDA BLAKE OR HER FAMILY, I COME BACK HERE FOR **YOU**. UNDERSTOOD?

YOU DON'T SCARE ME, FREAK.

THEN YOU'RE A STUPID MAN, GRAVANO.

SEE, I KNOW THINGS. THINGS YOU DON'T WANT YOUR SICILIAN COUSINS TO EVER FIND OUT.

HERE'S A COPY OF THE PROOF. GO AHEAD-- TAKE IT! C'MON, TOUGH GUY. IT'S YOURS.

VITO STANDS FROZEN.

FINE. HAVE IT YOUR WAY.

NOW, LET'S DISCUSS ANOTHER LITTLE MATTER. JASON WYNN. HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO HIM? HE HASN'T MADE YOU ONE OF HIS GUINEA PIGS TOO, HAS HE?

YOU GO TO HELL!

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING AGAIN!

UNGGK!

CRUNCH!

THEN I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO BEAT IT OUT OF YOUR BOY HERE.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, TREMOR?

HOLY...!

SPAWN...?!

OKAY, CREEP! YOUR TURN.

LIKE HE SAID, GO TO HELL.

STOP IT.

SENSING SPAWN'S ANGER, THE COSTUME REACTS. THE BONES SNAP EASILY.

CRUNCH!

I SAID STOP!

THAT'S MY BROTHER, DAMN YOU! YOU SAID YOU'D HELP ME FIND HIM, NOT KILL HIM!

WRONG. I SAID I'D HELP PROTECT YOU FROM VITO AND HIS MEN.

WHEN I SEE SOMEONE STANDING OVER A BLOODY BODY IT'S PRETTY EASY TO DETERMINE WHO THE BAD GUY IS. SO I'M KEEPING MY END OF THE BARGAIN.

CRUNCH!

IF YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH MY METHODS, THEN DON'T ASK FOR HELP NEXT TIME.

BESIDES, HE'LL LIVE IF HE GETS HELP SOON. I ONLY CRIPPLED ONE LEG.

TREMOR, GRAB YOUR BROTHER AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I'VE DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE FOR ONE NIGHT.

WHAT... DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO REHABILITATE HIM?

HE'S ONE OF *US*. ALWAYS HAS BEEN, ALWAYS *WILL*. PEOPLE LIKE HIM DON'T CHANGE. KILLING'S IN HIS *BLOOD*-- THAT'S WHY I'VE KEPT HIM AROUND.

I'LL *KILL* YOU...!!

NO. WE DON'T HAVE TIME, NOT IF YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR BROTHER.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU CAN'T JUST WALK OUT ON ME! I'VE GOT A FRIGGIN' *ARMY* OUTSIDE! YOU'LL BE DEAD BEFORE YOU GET *TEN FEET!* *NO ONE* SCREWS WITH VITO GRAVANO!

NO ONE!

SAVE YOUR BREATH, FAT BOY. NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU. GO LOOK.

CHRIST.

OH-- AND, uh, VITO...

"... DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE. I'LL BE BACK. REAL SOON.

"YOU AND I ARE FAR FROM BEING THROUGH."

image

48 MAY DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

TONY DANIEL
KEVIN CONRAD
T. BOCKER

AT EIGHTEEN FEET, THE OFFICE CEILINGS ARE IMPRESSIVE, GIVING THE ROOM AN IMMENSE **DEPTH**. THE WALL PANELS ARE IMPORTED CHERRY-WOOD; BEHIND THEM, BANKS OF RETRIEVAL, SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY SYSTEMS. FEATURED IN THE DECOR ARE STATUARY AND FURNITURE OF A PATRICIAN, VAGUELY **CONDESCENDING** STYLE, LAID UPON LUSH ORIENTAL CARPETING.

VERY FEW OFFICES CAN MATCH IT. BEING A CLOSE CONFIDANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER WORLD LEADERS DOES CARRY FRINGE BENEFITS. UNLIKE OTHER GOVERNMENTAL OFFICES BUILT TO THE SAME SPECIFICATIONS, THIS ONE BELIES ITS PURPOSE. RATHER THAN GIVING A SENSE OF HIGH PRESENCE AND ELEGANCE, THE LIGHTING HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO ILLUMINATE ONLY THE **NECESSITIES**. DEPENDING ON THE TIME OF DAY, IT APPEARS ALMOST AS A CANDLE-LIT FUNERAL PARLOR... OR AT NIGHT, A **BLACK HOLE**.

C.I.A. SECURITY HEAD JASON WYNN **LIKES** IT THAT WAY.

WE'VE PUT THE PROPER DOCUMENTS TOGETHER, ALONG WITH DENIABLY SUBSTANCIATED EVIDENCE. EVERYTHING TIES INTO A COHESIVE PRESENTATION THAT SHOULD CONVINCE THE RECIPIENTS THAT IT'S *ALL* FACTUAL.

WE PLAN ON MAKING THE DROP LATER TODAY.

EXCELLENT.

AND OUR OTHER INTERESTS...?

THE *GUATEMALAN* EMBASSY IS PREPARED TO HONOR YOUR REQUESTS. GENERAL HORTAS AND HIS STAFF ARE IN LINE WITH YOUR POSITION TO DEFY THE DEPOSED, TERRORIST LEADER. ADDITIONALLY, IN LIGHT OF THEIR PAST ENCOUNTERS WITH HIM, THE GENERAL HAS MADE READY *EXTRA* AIR SUPPORT FOR YOUR AGENTS.

IN *FRANCE*, SEVERAL OUTPOSTS OF THE RADICAL *"PEOPLE FOR A NEW MONARCHY"* HAVE BEEN...

THE LAUNDRY LIST OF RECENT U.S. INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES CONTINUES FOR ANOTHER HOUR.

"I DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW WHAT DIRECTION YOU'RE COMING FROM."

HEY! WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING!

TEN HOURS LATER, ON MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE...

UM... SORRY ABOUT THAT, TWITCH. I SHOULD HAVE WARNED YOU. SOME OF THE *SUPPLIES* CAME IN EARLY YESTERDAY AND I DIDN'T WANT THEM JUST LYING AROUND.

BOINK

SO I JUST *STUFFED* EVERYTHING IN THERE.

SO I SEE.

SO ANYWAYS, THIS IS WHERE OUR *SECRETARY* WILL SIT, ONCE WE'RE BUSY ENOUGH TO AFFORD ONE.

IN THE MEANTIME, I THOUGHT WE COULD JUST PUT A DESK AND A FEW FILE CABINETS OUT HERE AND TELL OUR CLIENTS SHE'S ON AN EXTENDED *LUNCH BREAK*.

EXPLAIN TO ME *AGAIN*, SIR, WHY YOU HAD TO DECIDE ON THIS SPACE SO QUICKLY?

THE REALTOR SAID SHE HAD OTHER BITES. IT WAS GOING TO GO *FAST!*

UP

I'M SURE.

COME ON! I WANT TO SHOW YOU OUR OFFICE.

OH MY GOD! TWITCH!!

WHAT IS IT, SIR?!

THEY FIXED IT!

THAT WINDOW WAS BROKEN THE FIRST TIME I SAW THIS PLACE. BUT I TOLD THE LANDLORD IF HE DIDN'T TAKE CARE OF THAT, THERE WAS NO WAY I WAS GOING TO SIGN THE FIVE-YEAR LEASE.

FIVE YEARS!!?

YEAH. ISN'T IT GREAT? AND I HAVEN'T SHOWN YOU THE BEST PART...

...TAKE A GANDER AT THIS!

Whew! IT JUST TAKES MY BREATH AWAY EVERY TIME I LOOK OUT.

SO? WHADDAYA THINK?

VERY IMPRESSIVE WATER TOWERS, SIR.

AND THOSE HUGE CIGARETTE BILLBOARDS BLOCKING 80% OF OUR VIEW-- THOSE ARE QUITE SPECIAL, TOO.

I GOT THEM TO THROW IN THIS CORNER SPACE FOR ONLY 20% MORE THAN THE OTHER UNITS.

SHREWD. VERY SHREWD NEGOTIATING, I MUST SAY.

SPAK!

Ow!

I WAS AMAZED WHEN YOU SAID YOU FOUND A QUIET SPOT FOR US. SEEING AS NO ONE ELSE IS RENTING ON THIS FLOOR, I'LL CREDIT OUR GOOD FORTUNE TO YOUR UNIQUE STANDARDS.

THANKS, TWITCH. I APPRECIATE THAT.

THE LULL OF THE MOMENT ENDS ABRUPTLY. BOTH DETECTIVES TURN INSTINCTIVELY, ALERTED BY A HUSHED SCRATCHING.

THE PACKET STOPS A FEW FEET INSIDE THE OFFICE.

YOU SAID THERE WASN'T ANYONE ON THIS FLOOR.

THERE ISN'T.

THEN YOU COVER ME. I'M CHECKING THIS OUT.

THEY TARGET-SWEEP THE ENTIRE LEVEL.

NOTHING!

CRIPES! WHO THE HELL KNEW WE'D BE HERE?

I DON'T HAVE THAT ANSWER, SIR.

BUT IT APPEARS SOMEBODY HAS A GRUDGE AGAINST THE MEN IN CHIEF BANKS' CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WHO WE TRIED TO EXPOSE.* EVERY ONE WHO WAS CLEARED OF INVOLVEMENT IS HERE.

*ISSUE 43 -- Tom.

WITH NEW INFORMATION ON THEIR CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES.

SO WE'VE GOT A RAT IN OUR MIDST.

IT APPEARS SO. BUT A FEW NEW PIECES HAVE ALSO BEEN ADDED.

YEAH! I HEARD THAT, TOO.

THINKS HE CAN KEEP COMING AND GOING LIKE HE'S SOME BIG SHOT!

WE DON'T NEED THAT. NOT HIM OR HIS TROUBLES!

GIVE IT A *REST*, JODY. ARE YOU STUPID, MAN?! YOU *AIN'T* GONNA STOP SPAWN. SO GET *OFF* IT. THE DUDE'S SOME KINDA *FREAK*.

... THEN I'D BE ABLE TO GO WHERE HE *WASN'T*.

YOU'VE *SEEN* WHAT HE CAN DO. MY CONCERN AIN'T ABOUT HIM BEING IN OUR ALLEYS. I JUST WISH HE'D STOP *ROAMING* SO MUCH...

HEY BOBBY! WHAT DO YOU *KNOW* ABOUT YOUR SO-CALLED PAL?

NOTHING. I-- I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE'D RETURNED.

WHAT?! YOU MEAN TO TELL ME HE HASN'T SAID *NOTHIN'* TO YOU? WHAT KINDA FRIEND IS *THAT*?

WHY DON'T YOU AND BOOTSY SMELL THE *COFFEE*. HE DON'T GIVE A *CRAP* ABOUT YOU.

SEE, WHERE *I* COME FROM, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A ***PART-TIME*** PAL. YOU LET PEOPLE YOU LIKE KNOW YOU'RE IN TOWN.

EXCEPT YOU'RE OVER-LOOKING SOMETHING FELLAS, AL ISN'T LIKE THE ***REST*** OF US. SO HE DON'T HAVE TO ACT OR DO ANYTHING THAT MAKES SENSE TO US.

RIGHT, BOOTSY! AL'S EARNED WHATEVER LIFESTYLE HE WANTS. IT SEEMS A FEW OF US HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT WE WERE LIKE WHEN WE FIRST ARRIVED.

OH, ***PLEASE!*** CAN THE SARCASM, BOBBY. YOU WHAT TO BE SUCKED INTO HIS CHARADE... GOD ***BLESS*** YOU!

TO BOBBY AND BOOTSY! WHIPPING BOYS TO *AL*, THE ***KING OF BLOOD.***

BELCH

HA HA HA HAA

HERE! HERE!

I'LL DRINK TO THAT...

IT GOES ESSENTIALLY **UNNOTICED**, THE POUNDING.

LOST AMONGST THE COUNTLESS OTHER SOUNDS.

BAM BAM KRAK BAM

THOSE WHO DO ACKNOWLEDGE IT ARE AWARE OF WHERE IT COMES FROM:

KRISH BAM BAM BAM

RAT CITY.

BAM BAM SCRAAPE BAM

THE ALLEY'S DEEPEST REACHES.

CRUNK BAM BAM SKREEK BAM

A PLACE EVEN THE HARD-CASE SOCIOPATHS FEAR.

A PLACE WHERE DARK SOULS ATTEMPT TO VANISH.

NONE ENTIRELY SUCCESSFULLY.

SPAWN!

AL!

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO YOURSELF? CONTINUING TO PLAY INTO THE DEVIL'S HANDS. OR MAYBE IT'S NOT ***YOU***. MAYBE THE ***COSTUME*** HAS FINALLY TAKEN TOTAL CONTROL.

THE COSTUME HAS NOTHING TO **DO** WITH THIS.

OH, REALLY?

YES!

SO YOU'RE PURPOSELY BUILDING THIS PRISON ON YOUR OWN.

TRYING TO ISOLATE YOURSELF FROM OTHERS. HIDE FROM LIFE'S REALITIES.

YEAH, THAT'S IT. BUT NOW YOU KNOW WHERE I'M AT. SO I GUESS I'VE FAILED.

YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT.

THEN TELL ME ABOUT IT!!

GKK

OTHERWISE, GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

WH-WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF YOU. POPPING UP WHENEVER YOU FEEL LIKE IT... PREACHING YOUR GODDAMN MYSTERIES...!

YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO ME, THEN SAY IT!!

BECAUSE I'M TOO EASY A TARGET. TREMOR. OVERKILL. THE CURSE. EVERYONE SEEMS TO KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME. WELL, NOT ANY MORE!

FROM NOW ON, I DON'T EXIST.

YES YOU DO. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO WON'T ACCEPT THAT.

QUEENS. THE NEXT EVENING..

WHAT WAS I THINKING? TELLING THEM I'D HELP REORGANIZE THE BOOKS FOR THE AUDITORS.

BUT, *NOOO!* I'M NOT CONTENT TO JUST MAKE SURE ALL PAPERWORK FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOSPITAL'S NEW CHILDREN'S WING GETS DONE.

NOPE. THAT ALL-CONSUMING TASK WASN'T ENOUGH. I NEEDED MORE. AND SARAH EVEN TRIED TO TALK ME OUT OF IT--TWICE.

I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO HER.

ALL THIS FINANCIAL STUFF IS STARTING TO LOOK THE SAME. MAYBE I SHOULD CALL...

OH, NO!

THAT'S *IT*. I GIVE UP!

I SWEAR I DON'T KNOW HOW TERRY DOES IT.

REQUISITIONS, LOAN COLATERALIZATION, BACKGROUND CHECKS. AT LEAST HIS ARE FOR SECURITY REASONS. ***OURS*** ARE FOR CHARITY DONATIONS...!

C.I.A. HEAD-QUARTERS, MANHATTAN.

AGENT **TERRY FITZGERALD** WAITS FOR HIS GLOBAL SEARCH TO LOCATE THE REQUESTED DATA.

IF ALL GOES WELL, HE'LL NOW HAVE ACCESS TO FILES THAT HAVE BEEN RE-ROUTED AND ENCODED TO NESTLE QUIETLY IN OBSCURE SUB-DIRECTORIES.

A LOOP HAD BEEN SET UP TO DIVERT ANY INQUIRIES INTO ANOTHER, SIMILAR, LOCATION.

TERRY'S HOPING THAT HIS ENDLESS OVERTIME HOURS WILL FINALLY BEAR FRUIT.

C'MON, BABY. DON'T CRASH ON ME NOW.

MY GOD.

IT ***IS*** WYNN! I KNEW IT! THE INCONSISTENCIES IN A FEW ARMA-MENT SHIPMENTS LEAD BACK HERE ...TO ***HIM***.

PERFECT! I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK I'D NEVER SORT THROUGH HIS DEFENSES.

NOW I JUST HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO NAIL HIS ASS TO THE WALL. BUT WITH THE...

?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

HE RUBS HIS EYES REPEAT-EDLY. AFTER A MINUTE THE BLURRING CLEARS UP.

FOR WEEKS NOW, TERRY HAS BEEN IGNORING HIS BODY'S SIGNS THAT SOME-THING MAY BE WRONG. HE'S BEEN ABLE TO RATIONALIZE ALL OF IT AWAY.

EVEN NOW HE TELLS HIM-SELF THAT THE COMPUTER MONITOR IS PUTTING A STRAIN ON HIS EYES-- NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS. HE'S BEEN OBSESSED WITH TRYING TO PROVE THAT HIS BOSS IS INVOLVED IN TREASONOUS EXTRA-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES.

IN THE PROCESS, HIS PRIORITIES HAVE BEEN DRIFTING AWAY FROM HIS OWN BEST INTERESTS.

HE'LL COME TO REGRET THAT.

JULIA, COULD I GET YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR?

SURE. WHAT DO YOU NEED?

CAN YOU FILE THIS STACK AWAY? I THINK I'VE FOUND WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR.

I HOPE IT'S SOME-THING THAT'LL HELP US BOTH OUT. RIGHT, TERRY?

UM... YES, SIR.

SO WHAT *EXACTLY* HAVE YOU PIECED TO-GETHER...? MORE INFORMATION ON SPAWN, I HOPE. THE PRESIDENT'S AIDES HAVE BEEN HUNGRY FOR SOME CONCRETE ANSWERS TO HIS RECENT TERRORIST ATTACK.*

*ISSUE#36 -- TOM.

THEY SEEM TO BELIEVE HE'S WORKING IN CONNECTION WITH SOME FOREIGN MILITIA.

A FEW MORE DE-TAILS SHOULD SATISFY THEM, DON'T YOU THINK.

YES, SIR.

I UNDER-STAND YOU'VE BEEN QUITE AGGRESSIVE TRYING TO SORT THROUGH THIS MESS.

I WANT TO BE ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE BEFORE YOU GET MY FINAL REPORTS.

EXCELLENT. I'LL BE ANXIOUS TO READ THEM.

THEY'LL BE ON YOUR DESK AS SOON AS I'M SURE.

CAN YOU HOLD MY CALLS FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, JULIA.

YOU BET. WHAT ABOUT WANDA?

I'LL TAKE HERS.

GOT IT.

THAT WAS ***TOO*** CLOSE. IF WYNN WAS TO EVER FIND OUT I'VE BEEN DIGGING INTO HIS ACTIVITIES, I DON'T WANT TO ***THINK*** WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF. IF I'M RIGHT, HE'S ALSO THE ONE WHO SET ME UP, MAKING EVERY-ONE THINK I WAS SOME KIND OF ***MURDERER****... WHICH MEANS HE'S CONNECTED TO EVERY LEGAL AND ILLEGAL AGENCY IN THIS COUNTRY. IF I'M NOT CAREFUL...

*ISSUES 20-24 -- TOM.

HEART RACING, TERRY WAKES FOUR MINUTES LATER. THIS TIME HE'S SCARED. WHY WOULD HE HAVE A BLACK-OUT, HE WONDERS.

AND THE BLURRED VISION?

SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG.

WITH A SHAKY QUICKNESS, HE CLEANS THE MESS AROUND HIS DESK, THEN LEAVES, TELLING NO ONE WHAT JUST HAPPENED

HE MENTIONS NOTHING TO WANDA. SHE'S ALREADY BEEN HARPING ON HIM TO CHECK WITH THE DOCTOR ABOUT HIS RECENT COUGHING FITS.

WITH ALL THE PRESSURE THAT'S BEEN IN THEIR LIVES OF LATE, HE DOESN'T WANT TO SCARE HER.

FOR HIMSELF, IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE.

Gasp!
Gasp!
Gasp!
Gasp!

ARE YOU GOING TO LIVE, SIR?

JUST GIVE ME A Gasp! SECOND TO CATCH MY BREATH. Hee-Hee! I CAN'T BELIEVE THE ELEVATOR WOULD DO THIS.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOUR EFFORTS TO PRY THE DOORS OPEN WOULD TRIGGER A HEART ATTACK.

THE GYM. I'VE GOT TO GET BACK. I'LL BE WITH YOU IN ANOTHER TEN SECONDS.

DON'T STRAIN YOUR-SELF.

EVENTUALLY THE DOORS ARE WORKED OPEN. BY THEN, DETECTIVES BURKE AND TWITCH ARE DEVOID OF ANY HUMOR.

WE DID IT!!

I'LL PHONE THE SUPER-INTENDANT TOMORROW MORNING. AND IF THIS ISN'T FIXED IN TWO DAYS, I'M DEDUCTING A MONTH'S RENT.

FIND OUT ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT FILE, TWITCH?

NOT REALLY. THE DATA SEEMS TO BE COMPLETELY ACCURATE.

AND I'M ASSUMING THE NEW INFORMATION IS RELIABLE, ALSO.

SO WHAT NOW? DO WE MEET HIM LIKE HIS NOTE SAID?

IT DOESN'T APPEAR WE HAVE ANY CHOICE.

WELL, WE'VE GOT TWO DAYS BEFORE THE MEETING. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND *SOMETHING.*

THOUGH IT STILL BUGS ME HOW HE KNEW WHERE WE'D BE, AND HAD ENOUGH FORESIGHT TO WRITE UP A LETTER. HOW'D HE KNOW THE TELEPHONE LINES HADN'T BEEN INSTALLED?

WHOEVER THIS MYSTERY MAN IS, HE'S VERY FAMILIAR WITH US. I WONDER WHY?

FRAGILE

=CHOMP= WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT. TOMORROW THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO DELIVER THE REST OF THE FURNITURE. =GULP= THEN WE CAN GET DOWN TO SOME REAL NITTY GRITTY.

=SLURP!=

WHY DON'T YOU SIT DOWN AND EAT, TWITCH?

I'VE LOST MY APPETITE SOMEHOW, SIR. I'LL EAT LATER.

SUIT YOURSELF.

UNBELIEVABLE.

EXTRA GARLIC JACK CHEESE

TUNA

BUTTER MILK

HEY, WHADDYA THINK OF THE NEW 'FRIDGE? IT JUST CAME IN THIS MORNING.

IT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR OVER TWENTY MINUTES. AT FIRST THEY CRAWL IN EVERY DIRECTION, CANVASSING AS MUCH OF THE SYMBIOTE'S BEING AS POSSIBLE.

THEN, WHEN THEIR "AURA OF EVIL" HAS BEEN PASSED ON TO THE OUTER SHELL OF THE HELLSPAWN, THEY SLITHER UP TO THE BEING'S HIGHEST POINT.

THEY ARE THE **WORMS**. THE CARRIERS. GOD'S CREATURES, EVOLVED NOW... **SPECIALIZED**... TO ABSORB THE SINS OF THE LIVING AND TRANSFER THEM TO THE UNDEAD.

THOUGH HE FIGHTS IT, AL SIMMONS IS A **SLAVE** TO THIS NEW RITUAL. INTELLECTUALLY, HE IS AWARE OF THE PROCESS, BUT HE CANNOT PHYSICALLY **CONTROL** ANY OF IT.

THE SYMBIOTE MUST FEED **ITSELF**.

FORTUNATELY, IT WON'T MATTER. THE CEREMONY WILL CONCLUDE IN ANOTHER FEW MINUTES.

ELSEWHERE.

HEY!?

WHO *BUILT* THIS FRIGGIN' BON-FIRE? IT BARELY WARMS MY NOSE. MAN, AIN'T -hic- *NO ONE* GOT ANY CAMPING SKILLS AROUND HERE? BURRP!

DO IT *YOURSELF* NEXT TIME, THEN.

YEAH, BOBBY. INSTEAD OF GET-TING PLASTERED, WHY DON'T YA DO SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE, LIKE PUT ANOTHER PIECE'A WOOD ON?

YOU'RE DRUNK, ORVILLE.

WELL, SO ARE *YOU!* -GASP!-

YOU'RE RIGHT. -BURP...!- *OH,* THAT TASTED GOOD. NOW THAT YOU'VE REMINDED ME, IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE OL' BLADDER GLADDER.

BEING SOME-WHAT MODEST, BOBBY SEARCHES FOR A BIT OF A PRIVATE SPOT TO DO HIS BUSINESS.

GOD, I'M GONNA BURST.

Tinkle Tinkle

SPLASH

UH?

HGHK!

WE HAVE TO TALK.

THE IMAGE SOBERS BOBBY INSTANTLY.

JEE-ZUS, AL! I THINK I CRAPPED MYSELF. WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I NEED A FAVOR. SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO ME, AND I CAN'T **STOP** IT, SO I HAVE TO **DISAPPEAR** FOR A WHILE. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG. I NEED YOU TO TELL THE OTHERS I'VE LEFT.

BUT I'LL STILL BE AROUND. **YOU'RE** THE ONLY ONE WHO NEEDS TO KNOW THAT.

UM... THANKS, I GUESS. ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?

NO, THIS IS MY PROBLEM. YOU'VE DEALT WITH ENOUGH OF MY FALL-OUT.

WHERE WILL YOU BE?

I CAN'T TELL YOU. AT LEAST NOT NOW. YOU'RE SAFER NOT KNOWING.

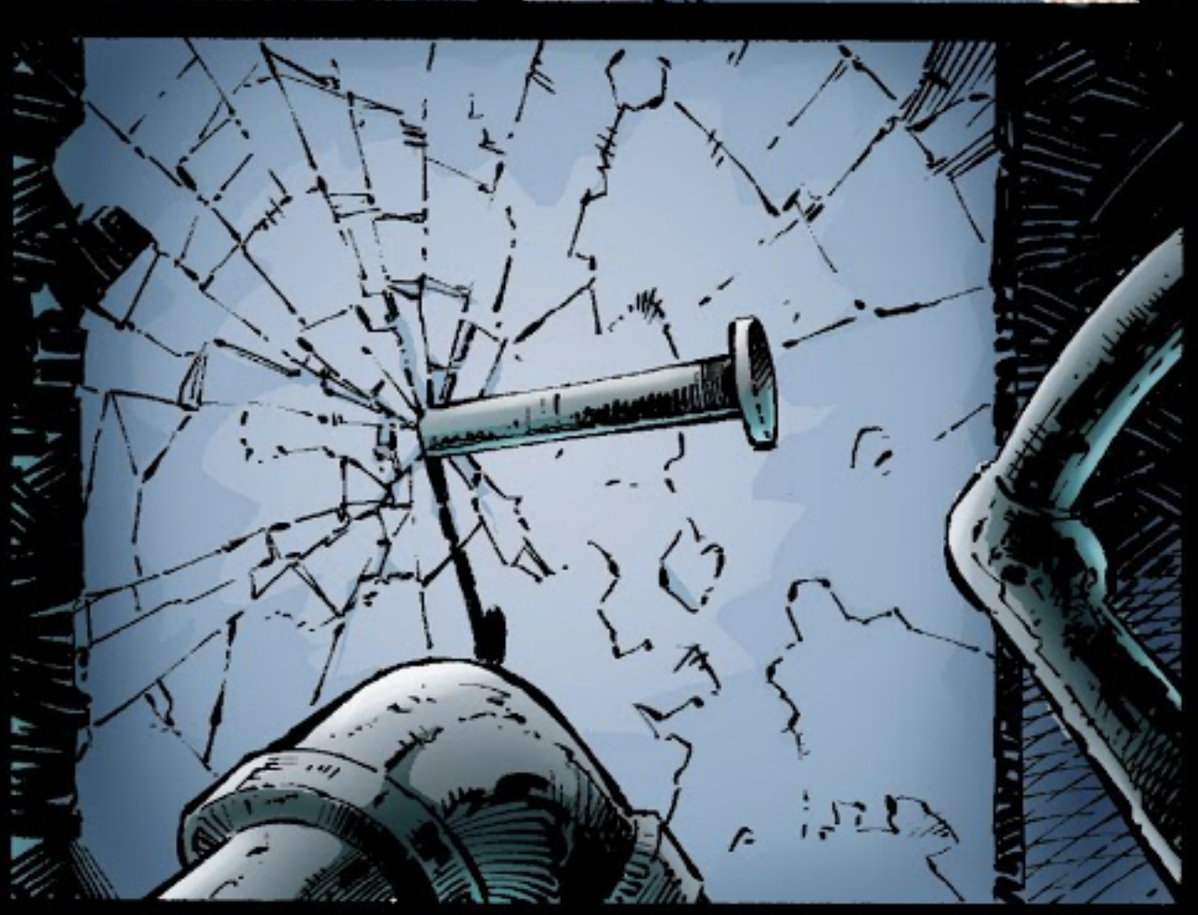
MY EXISTENCE SEEMS TO ATTRACT THINGS. UGLY THINGS. I'VE BECOME SOME DAMN MAGNET OF MISERY-- WHICH WOULD BE FINE IF IT DIDN'T SPILL OVER, BUT I CAN'T CONTROL THAT. SO I HAVE TO HIDE.

EVEN FROM YOU.

SEE, I WON'T LET YOU DIE A SECOND TIME.*

GOOD-BYE, MY FRIEND. I HAVE WORK TO DO.

* ISSUE #20--Tom.



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WE EXPECT THE REQUESTED MEETING TO BE CONFIRMED WITHIN 48 HOURS. THE AREA WILL BE PROPERLY SECURED, AND OUR SURVEILLANCE TEAMS ARE ALREADY IN PLACE.

ADDITIONALLY, I'VE ESTABLISHED THAT ALL PARTIES INVOLVED ARE TO MAINTAIN A DISTANCE PRIOR TO THE MEETING SO AS NOT TO BRING ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.

BEFORE I IMPLIMENT THESE ANY FURTHER, DO YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER ASSIGNMENTS BE DEVELOPED?

NO. THANK YOU.

VERY GOOD, SIR.

ALL I NEED IN BRINGING ABOUT THE DEMISE OF OUR TWO FRIENDS IS *RIGHT HERE.*

I'M TELLING YOU, JASON, THERE AIN'T *NOTHING* LIKE A GOOD *WITCH-HUNT.*

SPAWN®

image

49 MAY

DIGITAL EDITION

Capullo 96

Mc Kean 1927 1996 Brian

KNOCK KNOCK

GRANNIE? MAY I COME IN?

OF COURSE, AL, ANYTIME.

AND YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOCK, YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME HERE.

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I'D LIKE IT IF YOU VISITED MORE OFTEN. I HOPE THAT DOESN'T SOUND SELFISH.

NO, IT DOESN'T.

I'M SORRY IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE MY LAST VISIT.* I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PUT A FEW THINGS IN ORDER... WHICH IS WHY I'M HERE, ACTUALLY.

*ISSUE 38 -- Tom.

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING TO ME. AND I CAN'T SEEM TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. THINGS... THINGS YOU CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE ARE SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL.

AND I CAN'T STOP IT.

NOW YOU ***LISTEN*** TO ME, BOY. THE LORD BURDENS ***ALL*** OF US WITH OUR OWN PERSONAL CROSSES. SOME WILL SEEM A LITTLE HEAVIER THAN OTHERS, BUT GOD KNOWS HOW MUCH EACH OF US CAN BEAR.

I TOLD YOU BEFORE, AL. HE PICKED ***YOU*** TO BE ONE OF HIS ANGELS FOR A ***REASON***. IT'S JUST THAT NONE OF US, NOT EVEN YOU WHO LIVE WITH HIM IN HEAVEN, WILL EVER UNDERSTAND THE MYSTERIES OF HIS WAYS.

OUR PART IS JUST HAVING FAITH. GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF THE REST.

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. AT LEAST NOT NOW. WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME IS PUTTING **OTHERS** IN DANGER. INCLUDING **YOU**.

WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?

I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S **SAFE** FOR ME TO KEEP VISITING YOU.

NO! DON'T YOU ***DARE*** DO THAT TO ME!

I MAY BE OLD BUT I'M NOT STUPID. I'VE SENSED SOMETHING HAS BEEN GNAWING AWAY AT YOU FOR QUITE SOME TIME. BUT YOU DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THAT.

YOU NEVER RAN WHEN YOU WERE ALIVE, SO DON'T START NOW. THIS FEELING, THIS PREMONITION OF DOOM -- ***CAST IT ASIDE***. DON'T ABANDON THOSE WHO CAN HELP YOU.

WE ALL ***LOVE*** YOU TOO MUCH.

I HAVE TO LEAVE. I'M SORRY.

IT'S YOUR ***INNER DEMONS***, ISN'T IT? YOU MUST ***CONQUER*** THEM, AL, WITH THE ***LORD'S*** HELP, IF YOU EVER WANT TO FIND ***TRUE*** PEACE.

Hmmm...

N-hnnn...

OPEN WIDE...

Nnnn...

THAT'S ALL. YOU CAN GET DRESSED NOW.

IT APPEARS THAT EVERYTHING IS IN GOOD WORKING ORDER. I JUST WISH WE DIDN'T HAVE TO DRAG YOU IN HERE EVERY TIME.

WHY?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

BUT JUST TO MAKE ***SURE***, I'M SENDING YOU TO A ***SPECIALIST***. HE'S A DOCTOR WHO DEALS WITH ***NEUROLOGICAL*** SYMPTOMS.

NOTHING, I HOPE... BUT YOUR FAINTING SPELL TELLS ME THAT SOMETHING WENT WRONG.*

I JUST LIKE TO BE CERTAIN I HAVEN'T OVERLOOKED ANYTHING.

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

Oh, NOW DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED.

THE DOCTOR WILL JUST RUN A FEW ***TESTS***, POSSIBLY A C.T. SCAN, JUST TO EASE ***ALL*** OUR MINDS. I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN UNDER A GREAT DEAL OF PRESSURE LATELY... ON ***TOP*** OF THAT NASTY COUGH YOU'VE HAD... BUT US MEDICAL GEEKS LIKE TO KNOW WHY PEOPLE BLACK OUT FOR NO REASON.

IT HAPPENS TO MOST PEOPLE AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIVES. WE JUST NEVER KNOW ***WHY***.

WHAT CAN I SAY? WE'RE A CURIOUS LOT. SO I'LL SCHEDULE AN APPOINT-MENT...?

UH... YEAH, SURE. IF YOU THINK IT'S BEST.

COFF

COFF

COFF

OUT IN THE PARKING LOT, TERRY'S CHEST BEGINS TO TIGHTEN AS HIS MIND SWIRLS WITH FABRICATED IMAGES AND THOUGHTS.

IT TRIGGERS A SLIGHT COUGHING FIT.

HE CURSES HIMSELF FOR NOT DOING SOMETHING EARLIER.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

GODDAMMIT! WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

THIS MADNESS. I THOUGHT I'D GET AWAY FROM IT, NOT HAVE IT FOLLOW ME. NOT HERE!

NOT IN RAT CITY.

I WANTED TO BE SAFE.

BUT I CAN'T. I'LL NEVER BE FREE, NOW.

NEVER.

IT'S ME. I'M THE ONE. IT LIVES IN ME.

WANTING TO KILL. TO HURT EVERYONE. JUST SO I'LL LEARN TO BE LIKE IT.

LEARN TO HATE EVERYTHING.

AL, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOURSELF?

BUT IT WAS BORN IN HELL, MY COSTUME. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIGHT THAT.

IT'S TOO STRONG. I CAN'T DO IT.

I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING LEFT. THEY'VE STOLEN IT ALL.

NOT ANYMORE.

SO DO YOUR WORST.

A PRISON. HE'S BUILT HIS OWN PERSONAL ASYLUM.

HE WOULDN'T DO THAT.

I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING. IT'S ALL I'VE DONE MY WHOLE LIFE.

AND LOOK WHAT I'VE GOT. NOTHING AND NO ONE.

THE COSTUME'S GOT SOME KIND OF *INFECTION*-- MAKING IT *ERRATIC*. AL DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO READ THE SYMPTOMS. AND IF HE DOESN'T STOP IT FROM SPREADING, THE SYBIOTE WILL ADVANCE TO *NECRO-STATE NINE* BEFORE IT'S *READY* FOR THAT LEVEL.

AL!

HELP ME! *WHERE'S THE OPENING?*

GOT TO GET IN. DON'T HAVE TIME TO WAIT.

I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW THE OLD MAN GOT IN.

BUT HE DID.

MY GOD, AL...

NO.

IN ANOTHER OF THE CITY'S MILLION SHADOWS...

WHAT A SAP. WHAT A MAROON.

IF JASON WYNN IS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF "DISPICABLE" THESE HUMANS CAN MUSTER...

...THEN I COULD BE KING OF THIS PLANET TOMORROW.

HE'S GOT THE EVILNESS, I'LL GIVE HIM THAT, BUT I'M ABLE TO KNEAD HIM JUST TOO EASILY INTO WHATEVER I WANT.

HERO. SCAPEGOAT. ASSASSIN. POLITICIAN. I'VE MADE HIM PLAY 'EM ALL. HE DOESN'T EVEN RESIST MUCH... UNLIKE YOU, MY DEAR FURRY FRIEND.

AT LEAST *YOU* PUT UP A *FIGHT* FOR...

?

IT TAKES A FULL THIRTY SECONDS FOR THE *SIGNAL* TO PENETRATE.

YES!

YES. YES. YES.

THIS IS *PERFECT!* SIMMONS IS GETTING *CRAPPED* ON BY HIS SYMBIOTE. I ALWAYS DID LOVE THOSE K-MODEL UNITS. THEY'RE ALWAYS SO VOLITILE.

HEE HEE!

I MEAN, I KNEW *SOME*THING WAS UP WITH SPAWN AND HIS UNIFORM... BUT *THIS?!* EVEN *I* COULDN'T HAVE PREDICTED IT WOULD HAPPEN *THIS* QUICK!

HEE HEE HOHO!

I'M TELLING YOU, LITTLE FRIEND, THIS COULD SAVE ME A COUPLE *MONTHS* OF GROUNDWORK. JUST THINK-- *NOT* HAVING TO FOOL AROUND WITH WYNN. OR FITZGERALD. OR BLAKE.

JUST STRAIGHT TO THE *MOTHERLODE!* *BAM!* AND SIMMONS HAS A ONE-WAY TICKET BACK TO *HELL*.

I CAN *TASTE* THE VICTORY *NOW*-- *GULP!*

GOD.

HE WAS ALL I COULD THINK OF THEN. AS THE COSTUME THRASHED ABOUT, TRYING TO SPILL MY GUTS ON THE GROUND, IT WAS GOD I THOUGHT OF.

WHY WOULD HE CREATE ALL THIS?

WHY WOULD HE WANT TO?

DAMN YOU, MALEBOLGIA.

MY ANGER AT HIM WAS ALL I HAD LEFT: THE ONLY DISTRACTION BIG ENOUGH TO HELP ME FORGET THE PAIN.

EVEN AS THE TUMORS GREW AND MY GUTS SPILLED FORTH, IT WAS **ANGER** AT HIM THAT POSSESSED ME.

GOD MADE SATAN. SATAN MADE HELL. HELL MADE MALEBOLGIA. MALEBOLGIA MADE THIS COSTUME.

SO IT'S FROM **HIM.** FROM **GOD** THAT ALL THIS EVIL COMES.

IT'S **HIS** FAULT.

SOMEHOW, HE WANTED OR **NEEDED** THIS.

MY LOGIC MADE NO SENSE. IT DIDN'T MATTER. IT SERVED THE PURPOSE UNTIL ANOTHED DISTRACTION APPEARED.

AL! *FIGHT* IT! FIGHT THE *PAIN!*

IT'S FEEDING OFF YOUR *EMOTIONS!*

CAGLIOSTRO.

"THE COUNT." HE CALLS HIMSELF. ALWAYS APPEARS OUT OF NO-WHERE, LIKE SOME FRIGGIN' HOODOO MAN.

HE KNOWS THINGS... STUFF HE SHOULDN'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT. HOW? WHY?

AND HIS EYES. I'LL NEVER FORGET THEM. THEY GLARE WITH A DEFIANCE LIKE I'VE NEVER SEEN.

AT FIRST, IT DIDN'T SEEM TO MATTER WHEN THE CREATURE REACTED, SWALLOWING THE OLD MAN WHOLE.

EVEN WHEN A HUGE, SERPENTINE PIECE OF THE CLOAK SNARED HIM, HE DIDN'T APPEAR SCARED.

IT WAS MORE LIKE HE WAS WAITING FOR IT. SOMEHOW PREPARED FOR WHAT WAS TO HAPPEN.

THE COUNT NEVER FLINCHED. NOT A GODDAMN MUSCLE.

THE MUTATED CLOAK JUST SAT THERE, FROZEN LIKE A GIANT COBRA. I THOUGHT THAT WAS IT.

I DIDN'T NOTICE THE FIRST CONVULSION, BUT EACH ONE AFTER THAT GREW MORE INTENSELY VIOLENT.

ITS THRASHING BECAME A BLUR BEFORE IT ENDED ITS OWN PAIN BY VOMITING UP WHAT WAS POISONING IT:

THE COUNT.

HE ROLLED AROUND A BIT AFTER THE UNHOLY ABORTION, THEN LET FLY A STREAM OF DIALECT NOT FROM THIS PLANET.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT I DON'T REMEMBER, EXCEPT THAT IT FELT AS IF A HERD OF ANIMALS WAS BEING STUFFED INSIDE ME.

HE TOLD ME AFTERWARDS I WAS UNCONSCIOUS FOR ONLY A FEW SECONDS.

THAT WAS GOOD, HE SAID.

COME *ON*, BOY. CAPTURE IT. *CONTROL* IT. HARNESS ITS *POWER*.

YOU *MUST*.

IF ANY OF US ARE GOING TO LIVE THROUGH THIS, YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO *CAGE* THE DEMONS.

MORE RIDDLES. AS THE PAIN PASSED, MY CONFUSION DIDN'T. BUT IT WASN'T THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS.

THAT COULD WAIT. I NEEDED SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT.

HELP ME. PLEASE.

I'VE BEEN TRYING, AL. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? WHY DO YOU THINK I'M HERE?

BECAUSE OF *YOU*.

MY APPEARANCE HERE *ISN'T* AN ACCIDENT. NEITHER IS YOURS.

WE NEED EACH OTHER. SO DO OUR SOULS.

THEY'RE HIDING SOMETHING. I *KNOW* THEY ARE. I CAN SEE IT IN HIS FACE.

DR. ROLLINS
NEUROLOGIST
SUITE 209

IF I'VE GOT A PROBLEM, WHY DON'T THEY JUST SPIT IT OUT? ALL THIS WAITING IS KILLING ME. I'D RATHER HAVE BAD NEWS THAN *NO* NEWS.

mmmHmm

TAP TAP TAP

I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE. THIS IS CRAZY. I'M PERFECTLY FINE.

tic tic tic

THEY SAID THIS HAPPENS TO EVERYONE. SO, I SHOULD JUST GO. THAT'S IT! I'M OUTTA HERE.

WELL, MR. FITZ-GERALD, YOUR CHART APPEARS TO BE IN ORDER. IT LOOKS LIKE DR. BUSINO JUST WANTS ME TO RUN SOME STANDARD TESTS.

NOTHING TO GET EXCITED ABOUT.

I'M DYING. I'M DYING. I'M DYING.

THAT'D BE FINE. WHATEVER YOU NEED, DOCTOR.

PLEASE, MR. FITZ-GERALD. IT'S OKAY TO BE A LITTLE ANXIOUS. MOST PATIENTS ARE THE FIRST TIME. COME, LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT WE'LL BE LOOKING FOR IN YOUR C.T. SCAN.

HERE'S AN X-RAY OF A TYPICAL BRAIN. EACH AREA SERVES A SPECIFIC NEED SUCH AS MOTOR SKILLS. THOUGHT PROCESSES.

WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DETERMINE IS IF THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BE-TWEEN YOUR RECENT BLACKOUT AND THE COLD YOU HAD. SEE SOME VIRUSES TRIGGER CERTAIN CHEMICAL REAC-TIONS IN OUR BODIES.

YOURS MAY HAVE SOMEHOW BLOCKED SOME NERVE IMPULSES FROM DOING THEIR JOB. IT'LL SHOW UP AS A CLOUDY AREA, LIKE THIS.

WE NEED YOUR SCANS TO MAKE ANY SORT OF JUDGMENT. SO, IF YOU'LL FOLLOW ME, THE LAB IS NOW READY FOR YOU.

WE'LL HAVE ALL THE RESULTS BACK IN A FEW DAYS.

A FEW *DAYS?!* I'VE ALREADY LIED TO WANDA ABOUT ALL THIS, HOPING IT'D JUST BLOW OVER.

"NOW I HAVE TO KEEP THIS UP SOME MORE."

Um... NO, I'M SORRY, WANDA, HE'S IN A MEETING. HE SHOULD BE BACK IN A COUPLE HOURS.

I'LL TELL HIM YOU PHONED.

THANKS, JULIA.

THAT'S STRANGE. HE NEVER MENTIONED A MEETING THIS MORNING.

NEW YORK CITY. THE CONCRETE JUNGLE.

WITHIN THE JUNGLE NOW LURKS THE **BEAST.**

HE'S MADE IT. AFTER A JOURNEY OF NEARLY A MONTH, HE NOW SMELLS THE STENCH OF MAN.

BUT IT'S ONE IN PARTICULAR WHOSE BLOOD HE SEEKS.

SIM-ONZ

IT'S BEEN A HELL OF A WEEK FOR TERRY. TWO SECURITY SYSTEMS OVERHAULED. DOZENS OF INTERLACED PHONE CONVERSATIONS. ANXIETY OVER TEST RESULTS.

AND ALL THE WHILE RECONSTRUCTING JASON WYNN'S MURDER CONSPIRACY AGAINST HIM.

THE ONLY THING I STILL CAN'T FIGURE IS WHY HE'D TRANSFER ME TO HIS OFFICE *AFTER* THE WHOLE INCIDENT BLEW OVER. HE CERTAINLY KNOWS I DON'T HAVE ANY POWER OVER HIM.

WELL, *WHATEVER* HE'S PLANNING, IT'S ABOUT TO GET CLIPPED.

I JUST WISH I DIDN'T FEEL SO *TIRED*. NOW'S NOT THE TIME TO FEEL WEAK. I'M ABOUT TO WALK INTO THE MIDDLE OF A MINEFIELD.

THE WORLD BEGINS TO SPIN AS HIS MIND WANDERS. IMAGES DISTORT. HE BLINKS FRANTICALLY, TRYING TO REGAIN HIS FOCUS.

IT ONLY GETS **WORSE.**

THEN IT STOPS.

LEAVING HIM IN TOTAL DARKNESS.

VOOM

HONNNNNK

SKREE

CRASH!

BAM!

SKREE

HONK HONK

SKREE

HONK

THE CAR JERKS AS HE SLUMPS ACROSS THE STEERING WHEEL.

IT'S HIS SECOND BLACKOUT IN SEVEN DAYS.

LEAVING HIM COMPLETELY AT THE MERCY OF OTHERS.

HRONK

HOLY SH...!!

uh...

what?

HE TRIES TO REACT.

TOO LATE.

THEN ALL GOES DARK AGAIN.

CAN YOU BELIEVE OUR *LUCK*, TWITCH?! A BURGERWORLD SO CLOSE TO OUR NEW OFFICE...!

THE GODS ARE DEFINITELY SENDING US A MESSAGE, SIR.

SIR?

Mmmmm... THE 'BELLY BUSTER" WITH EXTRA CHEESE! *slurp*

AS THE DETECTIVES PREPARE TO LEAVE...

Oh, no.

BANG!

COVER ME, SIR, I THINK IT CAME FROM THE BUILDING FRONT.

WHOA! EASY, BOY! PUT THAT GUN AWAY, NOW. IT'S JUST THE CAR--IT BLEW A ROD OR SOMETHING.

YOU'VE BEEN EDGY LATELY. WHAT'S UP?

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE IT'S THAT FILE SOMEONE DROPPED OFF. I KEEP THINKING WE'RE BEING WATCHED. JESUS, WHAT DO WE DO NOW? YOU'VE ALREADY SPENT ALL YOUR MONEY ON THE OFFICE.

tink tink

NOT *ALL* OF IT. I'VE GOT A LITTLE *SURPRISE* COMING.

BRiING

BRiING

HELLO?

THIS IS SGT. FRITSCH OF THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE, MA'AM. ARE YOU WANDA BLAKE, TERRY FITZGERALD'S WIFE?

YES, WHY? WHAT'S WRONG?

I'M SORRY, MA'AM, BUT YOUR HUSBAND'S BEEN IN AN ***ACCIDENT.*** IT'S PRETTY BAD.

HE WAS RUSHED TO St. LUKE'S HOSPITAL ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. YOU MAY WANT TO...

CLUNK

clatter

HELLO?

HELLO? MA'AM?

image

50 JUNE DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

AT FIRST, HE THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A SIMPLE **COLD**. SOON IT DEVELOPED INTO SEVERE **HACKING**. NEITHER SEEMED OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

WHY WOULD THEY?

THEN CAME **DIZZINESS**, FOLLOWED BY A **FAINTING SPELL**. THAT'S WHEN HE STARTED TO GET ANXIOUS.

HIS FAMILY DOCTOR SENT HIM TO A SPECIALIST. THAT WAS A WEEK AGO. **NO ONE** KNEW. NOT HIS EMPLOYER, HIS FRIENDS OR HIS OWN **FAMILY**.

ON HIS DRIVE HOME TONIGHT, TERRY FITZGERALD EXPERIENCED HIS SECOND **BLACKOUT**. HE WAS AT HIS DESK FOR THE **FIRST** ONE.

THIS TIME HE WASN'T AS LUCKY.

IT WAS TRAVELLING AT 40 MILES PER HOUR WHEN THE ONCOMING TRUCK TRIED TO **BRAKE**. THERE WASN'T TIME.

THE DELIVERY TRUCK COLLIDED WITH TERRY.

HEAD ON.

SMOKE FROM THE WRECKAGE ROSE HIGH INTO THE EVENING SKY BY THE TIME AN AMBULANCE ARRIVED...

...SIGNALLING TO THE SURROUNDING BLOCKS THAT ANOTHER TRAGEDY OF MAN'S MAKING HAD OCCURRED.

SLAM!

NURSE!!

A PEDESTRIAN FOUND HIS WALLET A COUPLE OF YARDS FROM THE CAR.

IT GAVE POLICE A NAME THEY COULD TRACK. WITHIN MINUTES THEY HAD A LIST OF NUMBERS TO CALL.

I'VE GOT A NECK FRACTURE WITH MULTIPLE CONTUSIONS ON THE CHEST AND LEGS. HEARTBEAT IS STABLE AT 72, BLOOD PRESSURE 120 OVER 80.

WANDA...

HIS LOVED ONES WOULD NEED TO KNOW.

ESPECIALLY HIS WIFE.

SHE KNEW SOMETHING WAS TERRIBLY WRONG THE MOMENT SHE RECEIVED THE CALL.

SCREECH!

"GET TO THE HOSPITAL." THAT'S ALL SHE NEEDED TO HEAR.

AFTER LEAVING CYAN, HER DAUGHTER, WITH THE NEIGHBORS, SHE RACED FRANTICALLY TO St. LUKE'S MEDICAL CENTER.

THOUGH SHE DROVE COURTEOUSLY, A DOZEN LAWS WERE BROKEN.

SHE DIDN'T CARE.

MISS? MISS?! MAY I HELP YOU?

YES.

THEY BROUGHT MY HUSBAND IN. TERRY FITZGERALD. ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. HE'D BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT.

IS HE DOWN THIS HALL?

LET ME CHECK FOR YOU.

A QUICK CALL LATER...

SECOND FLOOR. HE'S STILL IN X-RAY-- WON'T BE OUT FOR ANOTHER HALF HOUR. YOU CAN...

SHE DOESN'T NEED TO HEAR ANY MORE.

... SO, ALL IN ALL, IT APPEARS YOUR HUSBAND WAS VERY FORTUNATE THIS TIME. HIS SPRAINED ANKLE SHOULD BE FINE IN A FEW DAYS, BUT THE NECK BRACE WILL NEED TO STAY ON FOR AWHILE.

YOUR CAR'S SEATBELT AND AIRBAG JUST DID BOTH OF YOU A HUGE FAVOR.

ANYTHING ELSE, Dr. CURTIS?

NOT REALLY. BUT SINCE THIS IS HIS SECOND BLACKOUT

SECOND?

... I'VE PUT A RUSH REQUEST ON THE RESULTS OF THAT C.A.T SCAN Dr. ROLLINS DID LAST WEEK.*

WHAT TEST?! WHEN DID YOU...

OH-oh.

*ISSUE 19.--Tom

HEE HEE... um, YOU SEE, WANDA, I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO GET WORRIED ABOUT A LITTLE TESTING.

I'M A DEAD DUCK.

YOU KNOW ME. ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR BEST INTERESTS. I KNOW HOW KOOKY YOU CAN GET.

KOOKY!?

Um, *EXCUSE ME*, FOLKS, I DIDN'T MEAN TO START ANYTHING.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW IS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY THE BLACKOUTS ARE HAPPENING.

I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT THE X-RAYS AS SOON AS THEY COME IN FROM Dr. ROLLINS' OFFICE. MEANWHILE, I NEED TO KEEP YOU OVERNIGHT, FOR OBSERVATION.

IT'S STANDARD PROCEDURE FOR ACCIDENT VICTIMS. WANT TO MAKE SURE THERE ISN'T ANY INTERNAL HEMORRAGING.

SO I'LL SEE YOU BOTH TOMORROW BEFORE CHECK-OUT.

LISTEN, HONEY, I'M SORRY I OVER-REACTED, BUT THE WHOLE DRIVE OVER HERE I COULDN'T STOP WORRYING WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU. I WAS SO SCARED.

REALLY *SCARED*.

I KNOW.

I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU SOONER ABOUT MY FAINTING SPELL.

IT'S JUST THAT I WAS SCARED, *TOO*-- STILL AM-- OF WHAT THE TESTS MIGHT SAY. FORGIVE ME?

SHE ALWAYS HAS.

SOMEWHERE IN THE SHADOWS...

YOUR RECENT SEPARATION FROM THE SYMBIOTE HAS *ACCELERATED* ITS EVOLUTION, WITHOUT ANY GUIDANCE FROM *YOU*. THIS IS A *VERY* SERIOUS PROBLEM.

YOU SEE, RIGHT NOW THE COSTUME IS RUNNING IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE. IT'S *LOST*. AND, LIKE ANYTHING *ELSE* THAT BECOMES LOST IT WANTS TO RETURN *HOME*.

TO HELL.

PRECISELY. AND SINCE YOU'RE ATTACHED *TO* IT, YOU'RE GOING ALONG FOR THE RIDE.

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

IT'S RECON-FIGURING ITSELF AT A TREMENDOUS RATE. USUALLY, THE METAMORPHOSIS TAKES *YEARS* TO COMPLETE.

AND *THAT'S* ONLY IF THE COSTUME AND ITS HOST ARE IN *SYNC*... WHICH YOU TWO DEFINATELY *AREN'T*.

DON'T TRIGGER IT. IT *FEEDS* OFF YOU-- YOUR *EVIL*. WHEN IT CAN'T DRAIN FROM YOU, THE *WORMS* BECOME THE CATALYST.

SO NOW I'M MADE OF EVIL.

NOT EXACTLY, AL.

BUT YOUR *ANGER*, EVIL AND SIN COME IN MANY FORMS, YET *ANGER* IS THE ULTIMATE PIPELINE. NOTHING GOOD HAS EVER COME FROM RAGE. YOU'VE BEEN MAD SINCE YOUR REBIRTH -- ALMOST *CONSTANTLY. THAT'S* WHAT'S *FEEDING* IT.

YOU HAVE TO LET IT GO. WHAT-*EVER* IS FESTERING INSIDE YOU, *LET IT GO! PLEASE*, FOR *ALL* OF US -- FIND SOME INNER PEACE. JUST *LET THE ANGER* **DIE.**

BEFORE YOU LEAVE, COG, I HAVE TO KNOW SOME-THING. WHO **ARE** YOU?

A REFLECTION OF YOU. WE'RE THE *SAME*, AL. WE *BOTH* USED TO BE REAL, A *LIFETIME* AGO.

IN SHORT... I'M A SPAWN.

CYAN, *No!*

C'MON NOW, MOMMY DOESN'T WANT YOU THROWING YOUR FOOD ALL OVER THE PLACE, OKAY?

I'm Spoiled

Oh-oh. Mess. Mommy, mess.

YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S A *BIG* MESS.

LET'S GET DOWN NOW AND GET DRESSED.

WE HAVE TO GO PICK UP *DADDY!* HE GETS TO COME HOME TODAY AND PLAY WITH YOU. WON'T THAT BE FUN? YOU AND DADDY?

MMMPHF

gmdm-

Mnntp!

phttt

HOLD STILL! I NEED TO CLEAN YOUR FACE!

AS THEY LEAVE THE HOUSE, WANDA IS ABSOLUTELY BEAMING.

BOUND-LESS JOY INFORMS HER VERY BEING. BIRDS. THE SKY. EVERY-THING SEEMS SO WONDER-FUL.

SHE THANKS GOD FOR ANSWERING HER PRAYERS.

DAD! DAD! DAD!

I THINK SHE'S MORE EXCITED ABOUT YOUR NEW ROOM HERE THAN ANY-THING ELSE.

PUSHH, PLEEZE.

OKAY! JUST TAKE IT EASY ON ME, SWEET-HEART.

HELLO, FOLKS.

HEY, DOC, YOU GOING TO SIGN ME OUT SO I CAN GO HOME NOW?

I'M AFRAID NOT, TERRY.

WE HAVE A PROBLEM. A VERY SERIOUS ONE. YOUR TEST RESULTS CAME IN FROM Dr. ROLLINS' OFFICE. THE SCANS INDICATE A RATHER LARGE GROWTH ON YOUR BRAIN.

IT'S A CANCEROUS TUMOR.

IT CAN'T BE!!

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT, DOC?

I WISH I WAS.

YOUR X-RAYS SHOW THE TUMOR NEAR THE BASE OF THE SKULL. IT'S ALREADY THE SIZE OF AN *ORANGE*, BUT THAT WILL SOON CHANGE.

WHAT'RE YOU SAYING? CAN'T YOU JUST *OPERATE* ON IT -- TAKE IT *OUT*...?

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DETERMINE. UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S SHOWN UP IN AN AREA THAT USUALLY INDICATES AN ATTACHMENT. IF THE TUMOR IS *MALIGNANT*, DAMAGE TO THE BRAIN WOULD OCCUR IF WE WERE TO OPERATE.

SO, WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

LET US RUN SOME TESTS ON YOU -- DO A BIOPSY TO DETERMINE ITS RATE OF GROWTH... AND WHETHER IT'S MALIGNANT.

DADDY! GO HOME!

"IF IT *IS*...?"

"WE'LL DEAL WITH THAT LATER."

TWENTY HOURS AND A BATTERY OF TESTS LATER...

YOU SEE THIS CLOUDY AREA-- IT REPRESENTS THE CANCER.

WHEN YOU HAD YOUR COLD, A *VIRUS* ENTERED YOUR SYSTEM. USUALLY, THE BODY COMBATS A VIRUS WITH A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT DEFENSES.

BUT AS YOUR COLD GOT WORSE, IT DEVELOPED INTO AN EARLY STAGE OF *PNEUMONIA*. AS THE VIRUS GREW STRONGER, IT TRIGGERED THE LATENT CELLS OF THE *CANCER* TO GROW.

MEANING YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD THIS IN YOU, JUST IN A DORMANT STATE. YOU, LIKE MILLIONS OF OTHERS, WERE PROBABLY BORN WITH IT.

UNFORTUNATELY, ITS POSITIONING MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO OPERATE. TO REMOVE IT *ALL*, I'D HAVE TO REMOVE PART OF THE BRAIN, *TOO*. THIS IS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT THE TUMOR IS *MALIGNANT*.

MALIGNANT.

TERRY SQUEEZES WANDA EVEN HARDER.

SO IT'D JUST GROW BACK, EVEN IF YOU *COULD* REMOVE IT.

YES.

MEANING I'M GOING TO *DIE*. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DOCTOR? H-HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?

AT ITS CURRENT RATE OF GROWTH, ABOUT TWO MONTHS, BUT THERE IS A SERIES OF PROCEDURES THAT CAN SLOW THE SPREAD OF IT.

WHILE ARRANGING FOR CYAN TO STAY WITH CLOSE FRIENDS WANDA TELLS THEM ONLY THAT SHE NEEDS SOME TIME ALONE TO SORT THINGS OUT.

HER FRIENDS PRY NO FURTHER AS SHE MUSTERS A WEAK SMILE, SAYING SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT, BEFORE LEAVING.

HER GUARD GOES DOWN THE MOMENT SHE ARRIVES HOME.

SO DOES SHE.

DAYS LATER...

GRANNIE?

AL? YOU BACK SO SOON?* I THOUGHT YOU WOULD. NOW COME INTO THE LIGHT SO I CAN *SEE* YOU BETTER.

SEE?! BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE--

BLIND? I AM. IT WAS JUST A JOKE, AL. YOU'VE BECOME SO *SERIOUS* SINCE YOU MOVED TO HEAVEN. REMEMBER HOW YOU USED TO MAKE ME LAUGH?

I DO.

I MISS THAT PART OF YOU. WHY HAS THAT DIS-APPEARED?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT THAT'S PART OF WHY I'M HERE.

*LAST ISSUE--Tom

A FRIEND TOLD ME TO FIND INNER PEACE. SOMETHING CALMING. YOU ALWAYS GAVE ME THOSE FEELINGS WHEN I WAS ALIVE.

IF I CAN HELP BRING YOUR LAUGHTER, IT'D MAKE MY DAY. IT'S TOO EASY TO FORGET WHAT'S *REALLY* IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

SO I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A *FAVOR*. COULD YOU GO SEE TERRY?--GIVE HIM SOME HOPE FOR TO-MORROW?

I SEE NOW I TOOK THAT FOR GRANTED.

TERRY?

WE *ALL* DO THAT, CHILD. IT'S PART OF BEING HUMAN.

YEAH. THINGS HAVE REALLY BEEN TOUGH ON HIM AND WANDA SINCE HE GOT SICK. THE DOCTORS SAY...

...oh, *LISTEN* TO ME.

YOU'RE AN *ANGEL*. YOU PROBABLY ALREADY *KNOW* WHY HE'S DYING.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

LATER THAT WEEK...

THE DOCTORS SAY YOUR MEDICATION IS HELPING CONTROL THE SWELLING A BIT. ISN'T THAT GREAT?

SURE.

BUT THE SIDE EFFECTS ARE SCREWING UP THE *REST* OF YOUR BODY. YOU HAVE TO *FIGHT* IT, BABY. DON'T GIVE IN. NOT NOW. I NEED YOU TOO MUCH. SO DOES CYAN.

TELL CYAN I MISS HER. I LOVE HER--AND *YOU*. MAYBE IF I'D BEEN A BETTER HUSBAND NONE OF THIS WOULD--

HUSH!

YOU DIDN'T HAVE CONTROL OVER THIS. IT ISN'T YOUR FAULT.

WANDA STAYS AT HIS BEDSIDE AS MUCH AS SHE CAN, TRYING TO KEEP HIS SPIRITS UP WITH EACH VISIT. MANY TIMES THE NURSES JUST LET HER STAY THROUGH THE NIGHT.

EXHAUSTED THIS NIGHT AS WELL, SHE SLEEPS, UNAWARE OF THE SENTINEL BESIDE HER.

TERRY USED TO BE HIS BEST FRIEND.

BUT NO MORE.

SINCE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD AS A HELLSPAWN, AL HAS DISCOVERED HIS FRIEND'S TRUE SIDE.

THAT OF A TRAITOR.

TERRY STOLE HIS **WIFE** FROM HIM. GAVE HER THE **CHILD** HE NEVER COULD. **PROTECTED** THE MAN WHO ORDERED HIS **DEATH.**

WHY SHOULD HE HELP HIM-- ESPECIALLY **NOW**, WHEN HIS SYMBIOTE IS BEHAVING SO ERRATICALLY.

COG TOLD HIM TO RELAX. NOT USE HIS POWERS.

AND HE WON'T. NOT FOR **HIM.** HE'S NOT WORTH GOING TO HELL FOR.

SO WHY DID HE COME?

TO GLOAT?

AND WHY DID HE SAVE TERRY AWHILE BACK? *

MAYBE HE DID WANT TO **HELP**... BUT NOT TO THE EXTENT OF MAKING THAT KIND OF **SACRIFICE.** NOT FOR **TERRY.**

CONFUSED, HE LEAVES.

*ISSUE 24 -- Tom.

SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT. SHE COULD TELL. THE NURSES HAD GENERALLY BEEN QUITE FRIENDLY.

WHY WERE THEY LOOKING AWAY FROM HER-- AVOIDING EYE CONTACT?

ELAINE...? IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

IT CAME SO *FAST*, WANDA. WE COULDN'T *STOP* IT. BY THE TIME Dr. CURTIS GOT TO HIM...

NO.

NO!

TERRY!

207

DEAR GOD.

THE WEB OF MACHINERY HOOKED TO HER HUSBAND PAINTS AN UGLY PICTURE.

IT'S A LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM... BEATING RHYTHMICALLY... HELPING TERRY BREATHE.

WH-WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM?

WE TRIED TO CALL, BUT...

I SAID WHAT'S WRONG?!

A COMA. HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS A FEW HOURS AGO. WE'VE RUN A FEW PRELIMINARY SCANS. IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD.

THERE'S BEEN EXTENSIVE BRAIN DAMAGE. HE CAN'T EVEN *BREATHE* ON HIS OWN.

PARTS OF HIS BRAIN HAVE SHUT DOWN, HAVE STOPPED SENDING CERTAIN MESSAGES. THERE WAS A LACK OF OXYGEN UP THERE FOR OVER TWO MINUTES, WHICH CAUSED MOST OF THE DAMAGE.

I'M TRULY SORRY, MS. BLAKE, BUT AT THIS POINT THERE'S VERY LITTLE WE CAN DO.

ARTIFICIALLY, WE CAN KEEP HIM ALIVE INDEFINITELY-- *IF* HE DOESN'T *WORSEN*.

MEANING HE'LL NEVER COME *OUT* OF THIS?!

NOT NECESSARILY...

"... BUT THE CHANCE FOR ANY *NORMALITY* IS GONE. IF HE *DOES* WAKE FROM THIS, HE WON'T BE THE SAME. EXPECT LIMITED MOTOR FUNCTIONS, IF NOT *PARALYSIS*. HE WON'T KNOW HIS OWN NAME.

"THAT'S NOT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE *CANCER*, WHICH WE CAN'T STOP. I'M *SORRY*, MS. BLAKE. I WISH I COULD BE MORE HOPEFUL."

"IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, DOCTOR. CAN I... CAN I BE *ALONE* WITH HIM, PLEASE."

AS THE DAYS PASS, MORE DETAILS BECOME CLEAR.

THE SAD PROGNOSIS DOES NOT CHANGE.

TERRY WON'T SEE HIS DAUGHTER GROW INTO A WOMAN.

CYAN WON'T EVER BOUNCE ON HER DADDY'S KNEE AGAIN.

*AND WORSE-- CYAN MIGHT NOT EVEN **REMEMBER** HER FATHER WHEN SHE'S OLDER.*

"OF COURSE."

AS FOR WANDA, SHE'LL NOT HAVE THE CHANCE TO GROW OLD WITH A MAN SHE SO DESPERATELY LOVES.

AT THE TENDER AGE OF TWENTY-NINE, WANDA SHOULD BE FULL OF LIFE, LOOKING FORWARD TO EACH NEW DAY AND ITS ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.

NOT ANYMORE. FOR THE **SECOND** TIME, SHE WILL OUTLIVE HER HUSBAND -- **ONE**, KILLED IN THE **LINE OF DUTY** FIVE YEARS AGO, AND NOW **ANOTHER**, BEING **EATEN ALIVE BY CANCER.**

SO SHE RETREATS INWARD, SHUTTING HERSELF OFF FROM EVERYTHING. EVERYONE. IT'S THE ONLY WAY SHE HAS TO HANDLE HER **PAIN:**

...TO BECOME COMPLETELY NUMB TO IT ALL.

JUST LIKE **HIM.** HE'S LOST THE PRECIOUS THINGS, **TOO.**

HE TORTURES HIMSELF **CONSTANTLY** WITH HIS UNREALISTIC HOPES THAT HE CAN GET HER BACK AGAIN.

IT'S ALL THAT'S LEFT. FALSE HOPE.

AND A LOVE THAT'S NEVER WANED.

FOREVER.

THAT LOVE IS TO BECOME A CURSE.

BECAUSE HE'D PROMISED HER, ON THEIR HONEYMOON, TO ALWAYS KEEP HER HAPPY.

FOREVER.

HE STILL REMEMBERS THE TEARS IN HER EYES, AND THE LOVE SHE GAVE HIM.

THE ONE WORD CONTINUES TO HAUNT HIM. FOREVER.

FOREVER.

I PROMISED YOU, WANDA.

EVEN IF IT COSTS HIM ALL HIS REMAINING HOPE.

AS THE FIRST JOLT IS UNLEASHED, HE TELLS HIMSELF THIS ISN'T ABOUT TERRY. IT'S ABOUT WANDA.

TERRY'S BODY ARCHES AGAINST THE PAIN. A SPASTIC FINGER CATCHES THE LACING THAT HOLDS SPAWN'S FACE TOGETHER.

SPAWN BARELY NOTICES.

HE'S THINKING ABOUT HIS LIFE.

HIS WIFE.

THEY'LL NEVER BE TOGETHER AGAIN, SO ALL THAT MATTERS IS **HER HAPPINESS**-- AND **HIS PROMISE.**

IT'S TIME HE LET HER GO.

AL?

I USED TO BE.

HE HESITATES, THEN HEARS THE WORD **AGAIN:**

FOREVER!

THEN HE'S **GONE**... VANISHED TO GOD ONLY KNOWS WHERE.

uh...?

HELP!!

HELP ME!!

BZZT
BZZT
BZZT

THOSE SCREAMS...?!

OH, NO! I'VE GOT A *FLAT LINE* IN ROOM 207!

CODE BLUE!

ELAINE, GRAB A CRASH CART AND COME WITH ME-- *STAT!*

THEY'VE BEEN TRAINED FOR EVERY SITUATION POSSIBLE, THESE NURSES.

OR SO THEY THINK.

HELP!!

PLEASE, CAN SOMEBODY HELP MY WIFE...?

I THINK SHE'S FAINTED.

THE STAFF WILL SEARCH FOR ANSWERS TO THIS MIRACULOUS EVENT.

THEY WON'T FIND ANY CLUES.

PART 2

DESTINY.

SOME BELIEVE THAT, FROM THEIR FIRST MOMENT OF EXISTENCE, LIFE AS THEY KNOW IT HAS BEEN **PREORDAINED**. THAT ETERNITY IS CONTROLLED BY FORCES TOO GREAT FOR HUMANS TO EVER UNDERSTAND.

THEY ARE WRONG.

WE THINK AS WE DO, ACT AS WE DO AS A RESULT OF WHAT LIES **WITHIN**. A **SEED** HAS BEEN PLANTED IN EACH OF US. HOW IT WILL GROW DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL.

THE SEED IS CALLED A **SOUL**.

THOUGH THE BODY EVENTUALLY DIES, THE SOUL MOVES ON. ITS ESSENCE IS THE TRUE VALUE OF EACH OF US, AN ESSENCE MEASURED BY THE SOUL'S ORIGINAL POTENTIAL AND ITS RESULTING CONDITION AFTER A LIFETIME OF INDIVIDUAL CHOICE.

THAT VALUE IS WHAT THE LORDS OF THE AFTERLIFE ARE MOST INTERESTED IN.

AT DEATH, EACH BEING MAKES THE SAME VOYAGE, WITH FRAGMENTED MEMORIES SPINNING IN THE VOID. THOSE SCATTERED IMPRESSIONS SHINE LIKE BEACONS, SENDING AN UNDOCTORED RESUME OF THAT INDIVIDUAL.

IT'S FROM THIS INFORMATION THAT WE ARE DEALT OUR FINAL JUDGMENT. OUR **DESTINY.**

THERE ARE ONLY TWO POSSIBLE OUTCOMES. **HEAVEN** OR **HELL.**

BY THIS POINT, WE ARE LOOKED UPON, NOT AS WHAT WE WERE AT DEATH, BUT AS WHAT WE MAY **YET** BECOME.

IN TERMS OF **BOTH** GOOD AND EVIL.

WITH HEAVEN AND HELL ALTERNATING CHOICES FROM AN ENDLESS POOL OF HUMANITY.

THE PICKS ARE BASED ON PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS. GETTING TO HEAVEN DOES **NOT** INDICATE A SPIRIT'S 'GOODNESS' ANY MORE THAN A SENTENCE TO HELL MEANS THERE IS AN 'EVILNESS'.

SOMETIMES THE DECISION IS MADE STRICTLY TO PREVENT THE **OTHER** SIDE FROM ACQUIRING ANOTHER VALUABLE PROPERTY.

IT'S UP TO GOD--OR SATAN--TO EXPLOIT EACH INDIVIDUAL'S STRENGTHS...

...OR WEAKNESSES.

FOR HELL, THE TWO EASIEST ARE ALWAYS **REVENGE** OR **LOVE**.

IT'S THE LATTER THAT DAMNED AL SIMMONS.

DEEP IN MANHATTAN'S BOWERY, IT STIRS...

ZZZZZ

... DREAMING OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AND WHAT MIGHT YET BE...

... IF THE BALANCE OF THINGS WERE TO SLIP EVER SO SLIGHTLY.

PLOP

Uh...?

WHAT?!

IT TAKES A FEW SECONDS FOR THE FACTS TO GARNER A RESPONSE.

HOLY HERPE! HE'S GONE!

MEOWW!

AND HE DID IT TO *HIMSELF*... THE *DOOFUS!*

FOR MONTHS NOW, THE **CLOWN** HAS BEEN TRYING TO PROVE TO HIS HELLISH FORMER MASTER THAT THE **NEW** SPAWN, LIKE ALL THE **OTHERS**, IS UNWORTHY OF SUCH VAST POWER.

THE **PROPER** LEADERS OF HELL'S ARMY, HE CONTENDS, ARE THOSE **BORN** AND **BRED** IN THE BLACK ABYSS.

NOW, HIS POINT HAS BEEN **VALIDATED.**

FOR CENTURIES THIS CREATURE, ONCE HONORED WITH THE TASK OF CHAPERONING EACH OF MALEBOLGIA'S NEW HELLSPAWN, HAS DREAMT OF THIS MOMENT.

FROLICKING WITH SOILED DISCARDS AND ROTTED GARBAGE, HIS CELEBRATION REACHES FEVER PITCH.

THEN COMES A THOUGHT--

--AND WITH IT, THE LOSS OF ANY JOY.

WAIT A MINUTE!

SIMMONS IS BACK IN HELL, BUT I DIDN'T PUT HIM THERE! HE SCREWED HIMSELF UP, LIKE A LOT OF THE OTHERS DID.

SO MALEBOLGIA WILL JUST FIND ANOTHER IN A CENTURY OR TWO.

CRAP.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANTED. HE NEEDS TO SEE THAT NO HUMAN SHOULD BE CHOSEN EVER AGAIN.

IT'S HIS OWN CHILDREN WHO SHOULD LEAD. WE ARE THE TRUE EVIL.

I NEED TO PROVE THAT TO HIM, ONCE AND FOR ALL...

...AND I KNOW JUST WHERE TO START.

A FEW DAYS LATER...

OUTPATIENT REGISTRATION

AFTERNOON, MS. BLAKE.

HELLO, DOCTOR. YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO SEE ME.

YES. I JUST RECEIVED THE RESULTS OF THE LATEST TESTS. AND TO BE QUITE HONEST, THIS WHOLE SITUATION HAS EVERYONE COMPLETELY STUMPED.

THERE'S NO MORE EVIDENCE OF CANCER *ANYWHERE* IN HIS BODY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE AREA OF HIS HEAD WHICH WAS AFFECTED IS CLEANER THAN NORMAL. WE'VE RUN EVERY DIAGNOSTIC I CAN THINK OF. EACH RESULT IS *NEGATIVE*.

SO WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

HOLY BIBLE

CALL IT A MIRACLE, BUT TERRY IS 100% CURED. SO, UNLESS EITHER ONE OF YOU HAS ANY OBJECTIONS...

... I'M RELEASING HIM TOMORROW. IT'S TIME HE WENT HOME TO HIS FAMILY.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR. AND IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE TO TELL HIM MYSELF.

OF COURSE.

THE DRIVE HOME FOUND THEM WITH LITTLE TO SAY. AND, AS TERRY WIPED A FEW TEARS FROM HIS WIFE'S CHEEK, THE TWO OF THEM FELL SILENT. LOVING GLANCES SPOKE FOR THEM... OF AWE, AND RELIEF, AND THE CERTAINTY THAT BEING WITH EACH OTHER MEANS MORE THAN ANYTHING.

CYAN'S GOING TO BE SO HAPPY TO SEE HER DADDY BACK HOME.

JUST KNOWING I'LL GET TO SEE HER PRETTY FACE AS SHE GROWS UP-- AND YOURS AS WE GROW OLDER-- MAKES ANYTHING I'LL HAVE TO BEAR FROM NOW ON SEEM EASY.

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW GOOD SHE BEHAVED AT THE HOSPITAL EACH TIME. SHE SURE...

CLICK

SURPRISE!!

FRIENDS.

A THRONG OF PEOPLE WHO NEVER BELIEVED A WORD OF THE MURDER ACCUSATIONS GATHER NOW TO WELCOME HIM HOME.

TERRY LOOKS AT EACH OF THEM AND SMILES. HE'LL NEVER AGAIN TAKE TRUE FRIENDSHIP FOR GRANTED.

TERRY GOES ON GRINNING BROADLY FOR THE REST OF THE EVENING.

HE MAKES SURE CYAN DOESN'T FEEL FORGOTTEN BY RIDING HER ON HIS SHOULDERS MOST OF THE TIME.

AND EVEN WHILE INVOLVED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EVERYONE IN REACH, HE CAN'T SEEM TO STOP GAZING AT JUST ONE SIGHT-- HIS WIFE.

HOURS LATER, HE FALLS INTO A DEEP SLEEP. BEING IN HIS OWN BED BRINGS A CERTAIN COMFORT: THE SECURITY TO RELAX.

AND DREAM ABOUT PEOPLE AND THINGS.

THINGS HAUNTING.

THINGS FAMILIAR.

AL.

THE DREAM REPEATS ITSELF, OVER AND OVER.

YOU KNOW, THE REAL WEIRD THING ABOUT ALL THIS IS THAT I FELT SOME SORT OF PRESENCE OVER ME, BACK AT THE HOSPITAL.

YOU MEAN GOD?

NO... AT LEAST I DON'T THINK SO. IT WAS MORE LIKE... LIKE...

OH, FORGET IT. I'M JUST RAMBLING.

NO YOU'RE NOT. I KNOW WHO IT WAS 'CAUSE I SENT HIM MYSELF. IT WAS *AL*.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

SURE. WHEN I HEARD YOU'D BEEN HURT, I ASKED HIM TO HELP IF HE COULD.

THEY CALL WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU A ***MIRACLE***. THEY'RE ***RIGHT***. AL SOMEHOW GAVE YOU YOUR ***LIFE*** BACK. YOU ***REMEMBER*** THAT.

BUT IT'S KINDA FUNNY, YOU KNOW.

WHAT IS?

WELL, AL. HE SEEMED SO *TORTURED* ABOUT HIS NEW EXISTENCE. SAID HE WASN'T *WORTHY* OF HIS POWERS. I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING ONE OF GOD'S CHOSEN ANGELS. BUT HE PROVED HIMSELF BY HELPING YOU.

WITH ALL CONCEPT OF TIME OBLITERATED, SPAWN'S ETHEREAL PRESENCE BREAKS THE BLACK VEIL.

A YEAR? A DAY? A SECOND?

NO ONE KNOWS HOW MUCH TIME THE SOUL'S TRANSITION TAKES, BUT DEATH MAKES IT **INEVITABLE**.

AT THAT POINT, THERE IS ONE RULE ADHERED TO BY BOTH SIDES:

"THOSE SOULS WHO SHALL RETURN TO THE AFTERLIFE PAST THE INITIAL ENTRY WILL FOREVER BE REMANDED TO THEIR FIRST LORD."

IN SHORT, SPAWN HAS RETURNED TO **HELL**.

TO COMPLETE THE ODYSSEY, HIS SPIRIT NESTLES ONCE MORE INTO THE FORM IT INHABITED MOST RECENTLY.

THOUGH HE DOESN'T RECALL THE EVENTS FOLLOWING HIS FIRST DEATH, WHAT HE SEES APPEARS UNFAMILIAR.

IT IS.

STRETCHED NOW BEFORE HIM IS A VAST WASTELAND: HELL'S SECOND LEVEL.

AS A FORMER VISITOR TO ANOTHER, HIGHER LEVEL, HIS PRESENCE IS ACKNOWLEDGED IMMEDIATELY:

AN ENEMY HAS TRESPASSED IN THEIR SACRED LANDS.

THEY APPEAR OUT OF NOWHERE... **GNATS**... THAT GAPING WOUND IN HIS FACE, NO LONGER TIED SHUT, ALLOWS THEM TO DIG **DEEPLY.**

WHILE HE'S DISTRACTED, THE **GROUND ITSELF** JOINS THE FRAY, SWALLOWING ONE LEG AND HOLDING IT IN A **DEATH GRIP.**

IT'S ONLY THE START.

NEK-TORR

ANOTHER WAVE CONVERGES, **SCREAMING** PAST THE CLOAKED HERO. SUDDENLY, THEY SNATCH A FEW OF HIS CAPE'S TENDRILS.

THEIR ATTACK IS FAR FROM RANDOM, HE REALIZES.

THEN, BURROWING UNDERGROUND, THE LEATHERY CREATURES DISAPPEAR.

THE HELLSPAWN IS NOW PULLED TAUT AS A STAKED TENT.

INTRUDERS WILL **NOT** BE PERMITTED-- EVEN THOSE FROM OTHER LEVELS.

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

THE UNHOLY LAWS REQUIRE THE STRAINS REMAIN **PURE**.

HYBRIDS WILL ONLY DESTROY THEIR UTOPIA.

YET, WITHOUT THE HYBRIDS, THEY CANNOT **LIVE**.

AND SO, INTRUDERS THAT HAVE TRIED TO CROSS THE VOID INTO THE NEXT LEVEL ARE PUT TO A **PURPOSE** BEFORE THEY DIE THE DEATH OF HELL.

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

INSANITY SPIRALLING AROUND HIM, SPAWN TRIES TO KEEP A GRIP, EVEN AS THE WEIGHT OF THE DEMON HORDE PREPARES TO SUFFOCATE HIM.

NEK-TORR

THROUGH THE CRACKS, THE SMALL ONES GET THERE FIRST.

AS HIS VISION BEGINS TO BLUR, AL SIMMONS WONDERS WHAT HE DID TO DESERVE THIS FATE -- THIS CURSE OF THE SPAWN.

WAS IT THE KILLINGS?

HE WAS ONLY FOLLOWING ORDERS, HE THINKS.

TOTAL DAMNATION FOR ANY MURDERER, THAT'S WHAT IT MUST BE.

NEK-TORR

THEY ARE NOWHERE. THEY ARE EVERYWHERE.

FIGHTING EACH OTHER FOR POSITION.

SO HE GIVES IN AND GOES LIMP, JUST AS THE PARCHED LAND GOES BLACK.

NEK-TORR?!

BUT HELL, LIKE HEAVEN, WAS NEVER MEANT FOR MAN TO UNDERSTAND.

IT'S A PLACE OF PAIN. HORROR. ANGUISH. FAR BEYOND ANYTHING POSSIBLE ON EARTH.

NEK-TORR MEEEE!

YET, AS ON EARTH, A PECKING ORDER HAS EVOLVED -- ONE PREDICATED ON **SIZE**. NOT SURPRISINGLY, **RESENTMENT** EXISTS.

THEY FOUND HIM FIRST, THE SMALL ONES DID.

THEY'LL NOT LEAVE HIM BEHIND.

NEK-TORR!

A PILLAR OF THEIR REMAINS PETRIFIES IN A HEART-BEAT...

...LEAVING JUST AN EXPOSED TIP.

NOW FULLY EXPOSED FOR THE TAKING, SPAWN'S HEAD WAS THE ULTIMATE PRIZE... THOUGH NOT **HIM** AS MUCH AS WHAT **MADE** HIM:

NECROPLASM. CONCOCTED AN INFINITY AGO IN HELL'S DARKEST REACHES, IT SERVES MANY USES ON MANY LEVELS.

IN MALEBOLGIA'S REALM, IT'S WHAT HIS WARRIORS ARE MADE OF.

BUT **HERE**, THE PLASM HAS ANOTHER PURPOSE: **FOOD**. WITHOUT TRESPASSERS TO FEAST ON, THE INHABITANTS WOULD HAVE PERISHED LONG AGO.

SO, EACH VICTIM BECAME THEIR VITAL NOURISHMENT.

THEIR CALORIES. THEIR JUICES.

THEIR SWEET **NECTAR**.

SPAWN WILL HAVE **NONE** OF IT. IF HE IS TO DIE HERE, THEN HE MEANS TO TAKE AS MANY OF THEM WITH HIM AS POSSIBLE.

HE THOUGHT HE'D JUST GIVE UP AND DIE. HE CHANGED HIS MIND.

Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS HAS ONE MORE FIGHT LEFT IN HIM.

GREEN ENERGY CRACKLES. SINCE HE'S A PRISONER OF HELL, WHAT DOES SPAWN CARE ABOUT CONSERVING HIS POWERS ANY LONGER?

FOR A HUNDRED MILES THE SKIES TURN GREEN.

IT'S HIS WAY OF EXORCIZING HIS OWN PERSONAL DEMONS.

HIS WIFE IS LOST TO HIM. FOREVER.

SHEER ANGER IS ALL THAT COMES FROM THAT THOUGHT.

PREPARE, DEMON, TO EAT YOUR HEART!

ADRENALINE IS TRIGGERED.

RELEASING ONCE AGAIN THE TRUE SPIRIT OF THE WARRIOR.

BRACED AGAINST PETRIFIED DEBRIS, HE STANDS READY FOR ATTACK.

FOOD. THAT'S ALL SPAWN IS TO THE CHARGING MONSTROSITY.

SOMETHING TO FEED ITS CRAVINGS. NO MATTER THE SOURCE.

ITS OWN SLAVES OFTEN FILL THE BILL.

IF YOU'RE SO GODDAMNED HUNGRY...

...CHOKE ON THIS!

LIKE SOME CRAZED TARZAN, SPAWN CLIMBS ATOP HIS KILL. FROTHING AT THE MOUTH, HE LETS RIP A NOISE NO HUMAN COULD POSSIBLY CONCEIVE OF.

THE SOUND, AUDIBLE OUT TO THE DESERT, IS CUT SHORT WHEN THE HELLSPAWN ABRUPTLY EVAPORATES.

ELSEWHERE IN TIME...

Perfect! It went just as I'd planned. My little Spawn has just picked up the first of his new gifts.

Unknowingly, of course.

C'MON, HONEY! TIME TO GO HOME. THANK MEGAN FOR INVITING YOU TO HER PARTY.

BALLOON! BALLOON!

OKAY, GO GRAB ONE.

THERE YOU ARE, DEAR, SWEET CYAN.

YOU'RE FUNNY.

THANK YOU.

BYE-BYE. I'LL SEE YOU *SOON*.

Hee hee hee hee hee

A few more pieces and my 'Grim Reaper' will be ready. Enjoy your next level, Simmons.

image

51 JUL

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

FRAGMENTED INTO A THOUSAND SECTIONS SPREAD ALL ACROSS THE NINE LEVELS, THE CATACOMBS OF HELL OFFER EVERY VARIANT OF MACABRE SCENERY IMAGINABLE.

THIS IS ONE SUCH SLIVER.

IT HAS BEEN CALLED BY MANY NAMES, THIS NIGHTMARE PLACE, AND YET IT REMAINS NAMELESS, OWING TO THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN TONGUE, THE FRAGILITY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

AND IN SOME DARK, VILE CORNER OF SATAN'S PLAY-GROUND, THE DAMNED WHISPER OF WHAT IS POSSIBLY THE HARSHEST LEVEL OF ALL:

THE FOURTH.

EARTH'S CURRENT HELLSPAWN IS ABOUT TO BECOME ITS NEWEST VICTIM.

HIS MIND TELLS HIM HE'S FALLING.

HEADING **WHERE?**

THE GREAT VOID ISN'T GIVING ANY SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE.

AND THAT, SIMPLY PUT, IS WHY THIS PLACE IS FEARED.

HERE, HUMANITY'S GREATEST **SINS** AND **ATROCITIES** ARE LAID OUT TO BE WITNESSED BY THE UNFORTUNATE FEW... BEFORE EVEN **THIS** BECOMES MUNDANE. IT'S NOT WHAT IS **SEEN** THAT MAKES THIS DOMAIN SO HELLISH--BUT WHAT IS **FELT.**

TO WIT:

AL SIMMONS IS **SLAMMED** TO A STARTLING **HALT.**

SOME TWISTED CRUCIFIXION IN A SPIRALLING VACUUM.

HIS PERSONAL **TORMENT** CONTINUES.

THEN FEELS HIMSELF BEING TIED **DOWN.**

HANDS FIRST.

THEN FEET.

STRUGGLE AS HE MAY, HIS INVISIBLE BONDS HOLD FAST.

WHATEVER HE HIT-- WHATEVER **PINS** HIM-- **FEELS** TANGIBLE. FORMIDABLE.

HIS **EYES** TELL HIM OTHERWISE.

WHAT KIND OF **MADNESS IS** THIS?

A **PRIVATE** ONE. SAVED EXCLUSIVELY FOR HIM.

THEN, THE **NOISE**: HIS FIRST CLUE, AND THE SECOND: **PAIN**.

IT GROWS **SHARPER** AS THE SYMBIOTIC COSTUME, ATTACHED TO HIS NECROPLASMIC **NERVES**, BEGINS TO **PEEL** ITSELF FROM ITS HOST.

FEEL

DETACHMENT. HE'S BEEN THROUGH IT ONCE BEFORE, ON EARTH.

HE PRAYED HE'D NEVER HAVE TO LIVE THROUGH THAT AGAIN. UNFORTUNATELY, PLEADING FOR GOD'S MERCY ISN'T **PERMITTED** HERE.

NOT IN ANY SHAPE OR FORM.

BUT OTHERS ARE **GLAD** FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT-- SUCH AS THE **LATEST** UNHOLY RULER OF THIS TERRITORY.

AWWWH... THERE YOU ARE!

GOOD. THEY *SAID* YOU WERE WAITING. SORRY FOR THE DELAY. I WAS JUST FINISHING UP SOME LAST-MINUTE *SEWING*.

NOW... *SIMMONS* IS YOUR NAME, I BELIEVE... IS THAT RIGHT?

SCREW YOU!

SPIRITED. THAT WAS ON YOUR *RESUME*.

THIS SHOULD BE A FUN SESSION.

YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT *OFTEN* WE GET TO DEAL WITH ONE OF MALEBOLGIA'S ELITE.

I THINK IT'S BEEN A COUPLE *MILLENNIA* SINCE THE LAST. BUT, WE'RE HERE FOR *YOU*, AREN'T WE?

NOW, WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO *START*? YOUR *CHILDHOOD*, PERHAPS?

MY CHILDHOOD?!

YOU'RE RIGHT. NOTHING *TOO* DYS-FUNCTIONAL IN THAT AREA. IT WAS A GOOD ENVIRONMENT.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

THE SAME THING YOU WANT. *ANSWERS.*

TO **WHAT?!!** YOU'VE **ALREADY** WON. HELL **HAS** ME.

BUT YOU DIDN'T COME *WILLINGLY.*

THAT'S THE **KEY.** YOU SEE, ONLY WHEN YOU'VE ACCEPTED WHAT YOU ***ARE*** WILL YOU EVER BE AT PEACE. ***EMBRACE*** THE EVIL THAT LIVES INSIDE. IT'S ***PART*** OF YOU-- JUST LIKE ALL ***THIS*** AROUND YOU.

HUH?

I DON'T **CARE** ABOUT YOUR FRIGGIN' HALLUCINATIONS.

HOW DARE YOU?!!

WHAT'S HERE IS ***REAL. VERY*** REAL. AND IT ALL COMES FROM YOU, THE HUMANS. YOUR CAPACITY FOR EVIL CREATED THESE HORRIFIC CONDITIONS THAT ARE RECREATED HERE. BUT WHAT'S OF FAR GREATER IMPORTANCE IS WHERE THE ACTS ARE ***BORN:***

THE ***SINS OF MAN.*** THEY'RE ***HERE.*** I CAN SEE THEM. A MUGGING OVER ***THERE,*** SOME ***RAPING, CHEATING*** AND ***ABUSE*** IN ***THAT*** CORNER... IT'S ***QUITE*** LOVELY.

IT'S THE *SOUL.*

YOU CAN'T *SEE* IT, YET IT'S *FELT* BY ALL. THAT'S WHAT THIS PLACE IS-- A HOLDING TANK FOR DARK EMOTIONS.

THE ACTUAL *PHYSICAL* STUFF I LEAVE TO THE OTHER KINGDOMS. HERE, WE GET TO THE *CORE* OF PROBLEMS BY STRIPPING *AWAY* ALL THE BARNACLES.

SO THE *EASY* QUESTION IS, *WHY* ARE YOU HERE?

WANDA.

NOT QUITE. YES, IT DOES HAVE *SOMETHING* TO DO WITH LOVE, BUT NOT THE KIND YOU'RE THINKING OF.

IT'S DOWN TO YOUR LOVE OF *KILLING.*

YOU'RE WRONG.

REALLY?

THEN YOUR MIND'S BEEN CLOUDED. LET'S PULL *THAT* LAYER *AWAY* AND RECONSTRUCT A FEW MOMENTS FROM YOUR *PAST.*

SMASH

YOUR *FIRST* KILL. DO YOU REMEMBER HIS *FACE?*

THAT WAS AN *EASY* ONE, WASN'T IT? BUT AS TIME MOVED ON, THE HABIT BECAME *ENTRENCHED.* YOUR DESIRE FOR MAYHEM DIDN'T NEED MUCH MOTIVATING.

SOON, *INNOCENTS* WERE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE. ALL THE WHILE, YOU FELT *ABSOLVED* BECAUSE, AS A GOOD SOLDIER, YOU WERE FOLLOWING *ORDERS.*

THEY *DECORATED* YOU MANY TIMES, FOR *HEROISM.*

IT FELT *GOOD,* DIDN'T IT?

UNFORTUNATELY, YOU WERE *TOO* SKILLED. SO, AS YOUR ASSIGNMENTS BECAME *BLOODIER,* YOUR VALUE INCREASED EXPONENTIALLY HERE IN *HELL.*

YOUR SPECIAL KIND OF *LOVE* IS *VERY* RARE *INDEED.*

THEY'VE BEEN HEMMING AND HAWING FOR CLOSE TO AN HOUR NOW. THREE SPECIALISTS TRYING TO SOLVE ANOTHER MEDICAL MYSTERY...

HOW'RE YOU HOLDING UP, TERRY?

JUST PEACHY.

BUNCHA QUACKS.

AN INTERESTING *THEORY,* Dr. ROLLINS, THOUGH IT DOESN'T TAKE INTO ACCOUNT HIS FAIRLY UNRE*MARK*-ABLE GENETIC MAKEUP.

YES. *WELL,* SINCE THIS PHENOMENON HAS ONLY BEEN DOCUMENTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S *SUPER-HUMANS, PERHAPS* OUR PATIENT ISN'T WHAT HE *APPEARS.*

MY FEELINGS EXACTLY. MUCH AS WE'D LIKE TO QUANTIFY THIS MIRACULOUS RECOVERY, IT'S DIFFICULT TO KNOW HOW TO FRAME THE *QUESTIONS.* Mr. FITZGERALD, ARE YOU *CERTAIN* THAT *ALL* THE DATA WE HAVE IS CORRECT?

YUP.

IMPOSSIBLE!

YOU *MUST* BE EXPERIENCING *SOMETHING* UNUSUAL OTHER THAN THE SUDDEN GREYING AT YOUR TEMPLES. AFTER ALL, YOUR CANCER HAS GONE ABRUPTLY INTO *REMISSION.*

AT THE SAME TIME, HIS NECK AND LEG INJURIES *ALSO* VANISHED. THIS IS *BEYOND* "CURE".

TERRY FITZGERALD IS NOT GOING TO BECOME THEIR GUINEA PIG.

WE NEED MORE TESTS.

YES. MORE TESTS.

HE'S BEEN POKED, PRODDED AND PROBED SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST 48 HOURS HE'S BEGINNING TO FEEL LIKE SOME U.F.O. ALIEN'S HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT.

THE DOCTORS DON'T KNOW WHAT CURED HIM. THEY NEVER WILL.

WOULD YOU MIND?

LOOK, *DOCTORS!* I ONLY AGREED TO COME THESE PAST FEW DAYS OUT OF RESPECT FOR Dr. BUSCINO. I *THOUGHT* YOU MIGHT HAVE A FEW IDEAS AS TO WHY THIS HAPPENED. BUT YOU *DON'T.*

SO I'M *DONE.* GOOD *DAY.*

A TYPICAL REACTION FROM A PATIENT SUFFERING POST-CONFINEMENT STRESS.

EXACTLY.

WE'LL AWAIT YOUR CALL AFTER YOU'VE GOTTEN SOME REST.

LOOK, GUYS, LET ME MAKE THIS *CLEAR*. I'M FINISHED HERE. IT'S OVER. I'VE LEFT THE BUILDING.

DENIAL IS A FAIRLY COMMON RESPONSE.

Oh, *I* HAVE ONE QUESTION. DO ALL SPECIALISTS HAVE TO BE OLD, BALD AND NEARSIGHTED?

SLAM!

TOUCHÉ.

?

I'LL BEGIN A STUDY.

C'MON, TERRY. THEY WEREN'T *THAT* BAD.

OH, YEAH?! I THOUGHT I'D BE A LITTLE MORE COMPASSIONATE AFTER MY NEAR-DEATH, BUT THOSE GUYS DROVE ME CRAZY.

THE WAY THEY TALK--! IT ISN'T NORMAL. BESIDES, I DON'T TRUST ANYONE THAT USES WORDS BIGGER THAN 'BANANA'.

THEY'RE JUST DOING THEIR JOB. IT'S TOO BAD THEY COULDN'T SHED ANY LIGHT ON YOUR RECOVERY.

YOU SEEM PERFECTLY HEALTHY BUT A PART OF ME IS STILL HAVING A HARD TIME *DEALING* WITH ALL THIS.

YOU'VE ALREADY HEARD MY OPINION.

NOT THAT WHOLE '*SEXUAL TENSION*' THING AGAIN--!

ONLY WHEN I'M AWAKE OR ASLEEP. THAT'S IT.

IS THAT *ALL* YOU THINK ABOUT?

MAMA! DADDY! LOOK!

LIKE AN ATOMIC EXPLOSION, SHE ENTERS: CYAN, NAMED AFTER THE PUREST FORM OF BLUE. AS THE BLUE SKY BRINGS **LIGHT** TO EVERY DAY, SO DOES SHE.

HEY, SWEETIE, HOW ARE YOU?

GOOD, MOMMA.

WHERE'S THE PUPPY, SHANNA?

GOING STINKY POO-POO.

WHAT'S THIS? Oh-- YOU DUG UP YOUR OLD SOOTHER, DID YOU, TO MAKE A NECKLACE. PRETTY NEAT.

THANKS.

NOO! IT'S MINE!!

HERE, LET'S GET RID OF THAT FILTHY *SHOELACE* AND TIE IT WITH SOME KITE STRING.

OKAY! OKAY! WHERE'D YOU *FIND* THAT, ANY-WAYS?

AT *HOSPITAL*.*

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

CRIPES!

THIS IS GIVING ME A BLEEDING ULCER.

NOW EXPLAIN TO ME, *AGAIN*, WHY WE NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THIS SNITCH, ESPECIALLY AFTER HE STOOD US UP FOR OUR FIRST MEETING. WHO NEEDS HIM?

IT'S THE *PAYING CLIENTS* THAT INTEREST ME.

WE NEED HIM BECAUSE HE *KNOWS* THINGS, SIR.

THINGS HE *SHOULDN'T.*

FOR INSTANCE?

Oh, HEY-- YA NEED SOME PIZZA?

NO THANKS

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS. IT'S A DETAILED RUN-DOWN OF EVERY BANK ACCOUNT CONTROLLED BY SENATOR JENNINGS' CAMPAIGN. IT LISTS DOMESTIC AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL HOLDINGS.

SO *OUR* 'DEEP THROAT' IS SOME GOVERNMENT STIFF. WHAT'S THE SURPRISE?

LOOK HOW IT WORKS THROUGH. CHIEF BANKS BLOWS HIS HEAD OFF. THEN, EVEN THOUGH WE GAVE *PLENTY* OF DAMAGING EVIDENCE TO THE PAPERS, EVERYTHING GETS SWEPT UNDER THE CARPET, LEAVING BANKS *HANGING* THERE, ALL BY HIMSELF.

SO WHY *IS* THERE ALSO SUCH A FOCUS ON SENATOR JENNINGS? HE RETIRED *YEARS* AGO. IT SUGGESTS SOMEONE *BIGGER* IS PULLING THE STRINGS... AS WE SUSPECTED.

*ISSUE 43-- Tom.

MEANING-- EITHER OUR MYSTERY MAN IS SOME *CRACKPOT*--

--OR-- --WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A VERY HIGH PROFILE *INFORMANT.*

WHO'S LOOKING TO BRING DOWN SOMEONE, SERIOUS.

SERAFINI'S PIZZA

OKAY, SO WE HANG WITH THIS GUY A LITTLE LONGER. I'M STILL CURIOUS ABOUT HOW HE FOUND US SO QUICKLY.

AND HOW THE *HELL* DID HE GET OUR PHONE NUMBER THE DAY IT WAS INSTALLED?

WE'LL FIND OUT WEDNESDAY.

PBLLLT!

AW, COME ON, TWITCH! IT WAS JUST A *LITTLE* FART. *=sniff=* BESIDES, I KINDA *LIKE* THE WAY IT SMELLS.

SNIFFFFF *ahhh...*

SNIF SNIF

OHMYGOD!!!

OHMYGOD!

OHMYGOD!

AIR!!

YOU GONNA LIVE?

I'D APPRECIATE A LITTLE *CONSIDERATION* NEXT TIME, SIR! EVEN *HITLER* GAVE A WARNING BEFORE HE ATTACKED!

DETECTIVE WILLIAMS NOTICES SOMETHING THING BELOW.

SIR, GRAB YOUR GUN, NOW!

WHAT IS IT?

A *CAR!* PARKED AROUND BACK! IT WASN'T *THERE* A FEW HOURS AGO--!

NOW WHO COULD THAT BE...? HEE HEE

T'INK TINKLE

WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT.

THE *CAR!* DIDN'T YOU WONDER WHY I WASN'T BOTHERED WHEN YOUR CAR *BLEW UP?** AND HOW I DIDN'T BITCH EVEN ONCE WHEN WE HAD TO TAKE THOSE GODFORSAKEN *CABS* EVERYWHERE?

SURPRISE!

Uh?

YOU LIKE IT?

LIKE WHAT?

*ISSUE 49--Tom.

WITH THE PRACTICED CAUTION OF A FIFTEEN-YEAR VET, TWITCH SWEEPS THE ALLEY IN A BEAT...

BAM

...FINDING NO ONE.

WHAT KIND OF *IDIOT* WOULD PARK *THAT* AROUND *HERE*?!

NOPE!

IT WAS 'CAUSE I KNEW *THIS* WAS COMING. *AIN'T* IT A *BEAUTY*? A '55 *CHEVY. COMPLETELY* REBUILT FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE. I KEPT PART OF MY RESERVE CASH TO GET THIS.

I ALWAYS *DREAMED* OF ONE OF THESE BABIES, BUT NEVER HAD A GOOD ENOUGH REASON TO BUY ONE UNTIL NOW. IF WE'RE GOING TO BE A *LEGITIMATE* DETECTIVE AGENCY THEN WE OUGHT TO *LOOK* THE PART.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE MATURING.

I CALL IT *The CRIMEMOBILE.* WHADDAYA THINK?

IT *IS* IMPRESSIVE, SIR.

THANKS. AND, *um*, SORRY ABOUT THOSE BEER-AND-PIZZA FARTS.

SO, WE'VE VENTURED THROUGH YOUR *FIRST* EMOTIONAL BARRIER. I KNOW, IT'S QUITE PAINFUL TO HEAR THE TRUTH, BUT LUCKILY, MOST OF YOU HUMANS HAVE ONLY A *COUPLE* OF BIG FLAWS TO WORK THROUGH.

SO, LET US PROCEED.

WE'VE SEEN YOUR LUST FOR KILLING. SO, WHAT *ELSE* HAVE YOU GOT?

HOW ABOUT *HATE?* OH, YOU'VE A GIANT *RESERVOIR* FOR THAT. TAKE *JASON WYNN*, FOR EXAMPLE. WHILE HE WAS YOUR *BOSS*, HE CONTROLLED MOST EVERY FACET OF YOUR 'BUSINESS' CAREER.

SOON, THAT CONTROL GREW MORE EXACTING, LEADING TO TENSION. ARGUMENTS. *ANGER*.

EVENTUALLY, HE FOUND IT NECESSARY TO HAVE YOU *MURDERED*.

SENDING YOU TO *US*.

YOU *LOVED* THAT, DIDN'T YOU. TO *HATE* HIM, I MEAN. YOU HATED HIM WHEN YOU WERE ALIVE, AND YOUR DEATH GAVE YOU NO REASON TO CHANGE YOUR MIND.

YOU SHOULD BE PROUD.

MALEBOLGIA IS. HATEFUL KILLERS RATE *HIGH* ON HIS LIST.

AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL APTITUDE-- LIKE YOURSELF-- GET A *BONUS*.

THE *COSTUME*.

BY NOW, I'M SURE YOU'VE BEEN WONDERING WHAT'S *HAPPENED* TO IT-- WHY IT'S NOT *PROTECTING* YOU. QUITE SIMPLE. IT'S *HOME*.

WE *GROW* THEM HERE, YOU SEE. WHEN THEY'RE FULLY FUNCTIONAL, WE DELIVER THEM TO MALEBOLGIA'S EIGHTH LEVEL FOR *ATTACHMENT*.

FROM AMONG THEM, ONLY A SELECT FEW GET TO GRAFT TO HIS CHOSEN *OFFICERS*.

WE'RE SO HAPPY FOR THIS K-125 UNIT.

YOU, MR. SIMMONS, ARE NO DIFFERENT.

HE'S BEEN DOWN AT YOUR FEET ALL THIS TIME. THEY CAN BE A RATHER *SHY* LOT AROUND THEIR MAKERS.

BUT I DIGRESS.

YOU'VE BECOME A HELLSPAWN, NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE YOU *ARE* EVIL, BUT IN ANTICIPATION OF THE REALIZATION OF YOUR FULL *POTENTIAL*.

THAT'S HOW SOULS *REACH* HEAVEN OR HELL.

BUT YOU HAVEN'T *ACCEPTED* THAT.

WHY?

BECAUSE OF *WANDA*.

AND YOUR SUPPOSED *LOVE* FOR HER.

AIEEE

PLEASE, EXCUSE THE *PAIN*. THOSE WHO'VE PRECEEDED YOU BEGGED FOR THEIR OWN PHYSICALITY HERE, SINCE NOTHING TANGIBLE WAS AROUND TO ASSURE THEM THEY STILL *EXISTED*.

SO I *SKINNED* THEM.

THEN I SEWED THEIR FORMS TO MY OWN-- A *SOUVENIR* OF OUR TIME TOGETHER.

AFTER ALL, WE *NEED* TO BE REMINDED OF THE PAST. OF TIME LOST.

REMEMBER THE *FIRST* TIME YOU SAW HER...? IT TOOK YOU NEARLY *FOUR DAYS* TO GET UP THE NERVE TO *INTRODUCE* YOURSELF.

AND AFTER ALL THAT, ON YOUR FIRST FEW DATES SHE DIDN'T EVEN SEEM PARTICULARLY *INTERESTED*.

BEFORE LONG, THAT CHANGED. YOUR COURTSHIP, THE GIVE-AND-TAKE, SHOWED THE SYMPATHIES YOU BOTH EMBRACED.

THEN, IN ALMOST NO TIME, A FULL-BLOWN ***LOVE*** SPROUTED IN YOU BOTH. YOU GOT YOUR WISH, THAT YOU'D SPEND THE REST OF YOUR ***LIVES*** TOGETHER.

IT ALL SEEMED SO *PERFECT*, DIDN'T IT? SO *WHAT* IF YOU COULDN'T FATHER ANY CHILDREN. SO *WHAT* IF YOUR SECRET ASSIGNMENTS TOOK YOU AWAY FOR WEEKS AT A TIME? *LOVE* WOULD CARRY YOU.

YOUR LOVE FOR *BLOOD*.
YOUR LOVE FOR *WANDA*.

THEY EXPANDED SIMULTANEOUSLY.

ONE FOUGHT THE OTHER FOR PRIMACY. BECAUSE *LOVE*, AL, NEEDS A CONSTANT FLOW OF *NOURISHMENT*. SOMETHING HAD TO GIVE.

SURPRISE! IT WAS *YOU*.

AT FIRST, WANDA MOURNED. HER HEART ACHED. A *LOVING* WIFE GOES THROUGH THAT.

SHE ALSO *LOVED* YOU SO MUCH THAT SHE THEN FOUND COMFORT IN ANOTHER MAN. YOUR FRIEND. AND, WELL, *HIS* PLUMBING *WORKED*. THEIR *DAUGHTER* ALMOST MADE THEM FORGET *YOU*.

WHAT DID THEY CARE ABOUT YOU, AFTER ALL? THEY HAD EACH OTHER. TO CHERISH. TO LUST AFTER. *TO LOVE!*

SHE GAVE HER *BODY* TO HIM.

IT'S N-NOT HER FAULT.

YOU'RE RIGHT. STILL, ALL THIS *LOVE* HAS LED YOU TO *THIS* MOMENT. DO YOU KNOW *WHY?* BECAUSE MALEBOLGIA'S *TOYING* WITH YOU-- LETTING YOU BELIEVE YOU'RE STILL *HUMAN.*

YOU'RE NOT. YOU'RE *NECRO-PLASM* NOW. AS A CRUEL JOKE, HE LET YOU *KEEP* SOME-THING.

EVEN THOUGH YOU DON'T *NEED* IT ANY LONGER.

SO. IT'S TIME TO *RELIEVE* YOU OF YOUR AGONY.

THE ORIGIN OF ALL YOUR PAIN IS *THIS.*

YOU'RE *CLEANSED* NOW, CHILD. MANY IN HELL WILL SMILE THIS NIGHT. IT'S TIME AT LAST FOR YOU TO TAKE THE *MANTLE* OF THE *HELLSPAWN.*

GIVE MY REGARDS TO THE OTHER LORDS--AND THANK YOUR *MASTER* FOR THE *SOUVENIR.*

AN INFINITY AWAY, IN THE BLEAKNESS OF HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL, A KING CACKLES.

HEH HEH HAHAHAHAHA

My warrior's transformation continues as expected. His second incarnation is now complete. With only a bit more modification, Simmons will be ready to take his place in hell's army as a General...

... one devoid of any emotion.

WU BUB
WU BUB
WU BUB
WU BUB

image

52 AUG

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

CAPULLO '96

McFARLANE

THROUGH THE CENTURIES IT'S TOUCHED LITERALLY MILLIONS OF LIVES-- SOME THROUGH DIRECT CONTACT, OTHERS MERELY THE VICTIMS OF FALLOUT THEY WEREN'T EVEN AWARE OF. IT'S MERE EXISTENCE HAS CAUSED A RIPPLE EFFECT THAT SWALLOWED MANY WORTHY OF DEATH AND THOUSANDS OF INNOCENTS WHOSE ONLY 'CRIME' WAS TO BE CAUGHT IN ITS WAKE.

ITS TIME HAS COME AGAIN. IT IS NOW IN EVIDENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS:

THE HELLSPAWN. AND THE CURSE HE BRINGS WITH HIM.

AT FIRST, THE CREATURE IS DISORIENTED FROM THE TRANSFORMATION AND HAS ONLY LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPLICATIONS. AS A RESULT, THE NEW SPAWN WARRIOR THINKS OF THINGS ON A PERSONAL LEVEL EXCLUSIVELY, TRYING DESPERATELY TO MAKE SENSE OF HIS RETURN FROM THE GRAVE. IT'S AT THIS TIME THE METAPHORICAL PEBBLE HITS THE WATER AND THE OUTWARD RIPPLING BEGINS. HELL SMILES, ANTICIPATING THE AVALANCHE OF SOULS TO BE DELIVERED SOON TO THE FLAMING PITS -- GROWING THE ARMIES WHICH WILL ONE DAY OPPOSE HEAVEN.

THE OFFICER-IN-TRAINING GRASPS NONE OF THIS, AS HE IS CONSUMED BY THE URGE TO REGAIN A LIFE NOW FOREVER LOST.

ALL OF WHICH BRINGS US NOW TO THIS QUIET, NONDESCRIPT HOUSE -- WHICH, AT FIRST GLANCE, APPEARS TO BE JUST LIKE THE OTHER HOUSES ON THE BLOCK. AND, IN FACT, IT IS. THOSE WHO LIVE WITHIN ITS WALLS ARE WHAT MAKE IT DIFFERENT. ARE WHAT MAKE IT CURSED.

FOR THEY HAVE ALL BEEN TOUCHED.

THIS ONE HAS BEEN AT THE **GREATEST** DISTANCE FROM THE CREATURE. SHE HAS HAD BUT A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH THE SPAWN WHILE HE WAS IN THE GUISE OF ANOTHER. IT'S HER **MOTHER AND FATHER** WHO'VE BEEN ENMESHED IN THE TRAUMA OF HELL'S NEW WARRIOR.

THAT SITUATION HAS CHANGED.

WHEN SHE FOUND IT AT THE HOSPITAL, SHE FELT THE SAME AS WHEN SHE'S GOTTEN PRESENTS AT CHRISTMAS. WHY? SHE DIDN'T KNOW. IT WAS ONLY A **DIRTY OLD SHOELACE,** BUT SHE FELT COMPELLED TO TURN IT INTO SOME KIND OF **TREASURE.** SO, SHE DUG OUT A **SOOTHER** SHE HADN'T USED IN OVER FOURTEEN MONTHS AND MADE HERSELF A NECKLACE. TONIGHT, SHE WENT BACK TO SUCKING THE SOOTHER, FEELING AN **ATTACHMENT** TO HER NEWFOUND GIFT--

--THE SHOELACE --

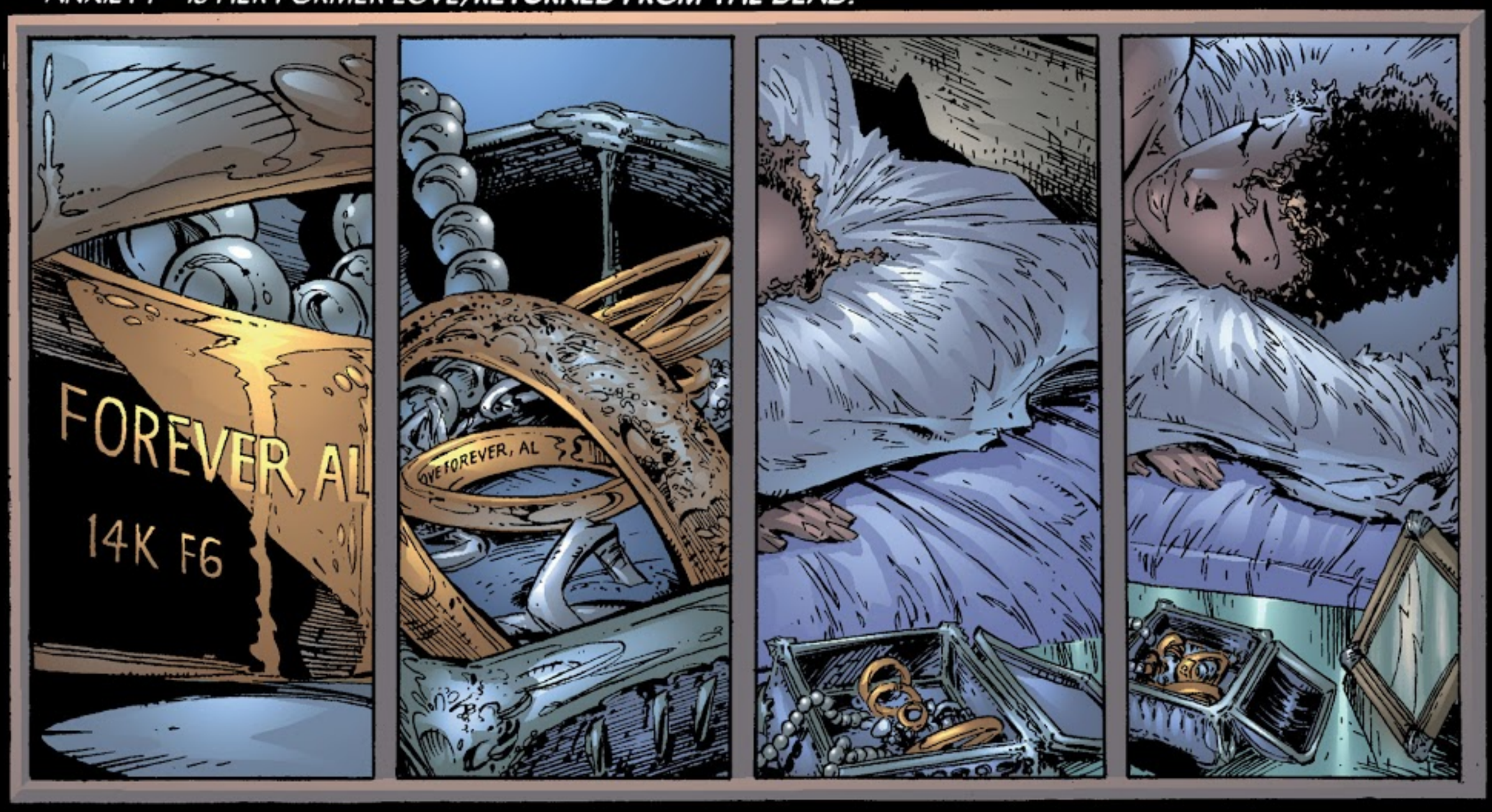
--THE UNSUSPECTED **EVIDENCE** THAT **SOMETHING** OR **SOMEONE** HAD INTERVENED AGAINST HER FATHER'S IRREVERSABLE ILLNESS.

JUST DOWN THE HALL RESTS HER MOTHER. SHE WAS ONCE MARRIED TO A MAN NAMED **AL SIMMONS.** HE DIED OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, "IN DEFENSE OF HIS COUNTRY"... OR SO SHE WAS **TOLD.** AT HIS GRAVESITE, THEY GAVE HER AN AMERICAN FLAG AS A TOKEN OF HIS NATION'S GRATITUDE. THOUGH THANKFUL FOR IT, SHE HELD IN HER FIST A MOMENTO OF FAR **GREATER** VALUE:

HER WEDDING BAND.

IT WAS NEARLY A YEAR BEFORE SHE PUT IT ASIDE, AT THE TIME WHEN SHE STARTED DATING ANOTHER MAN, **TERRY FITZGERALD... AL'S BEST FRIEND.** TERRY BROUGHT HAPPINESS INTO HER LIFE. THEY MARRIED ANOTHER YEAR LATER. AND YET, HER FIRST RING STILL SITS NO MORE THAN ARM'S-LENGTH AWAY-- FOREVER KEEPING AL'S MEMORY ALIVE.

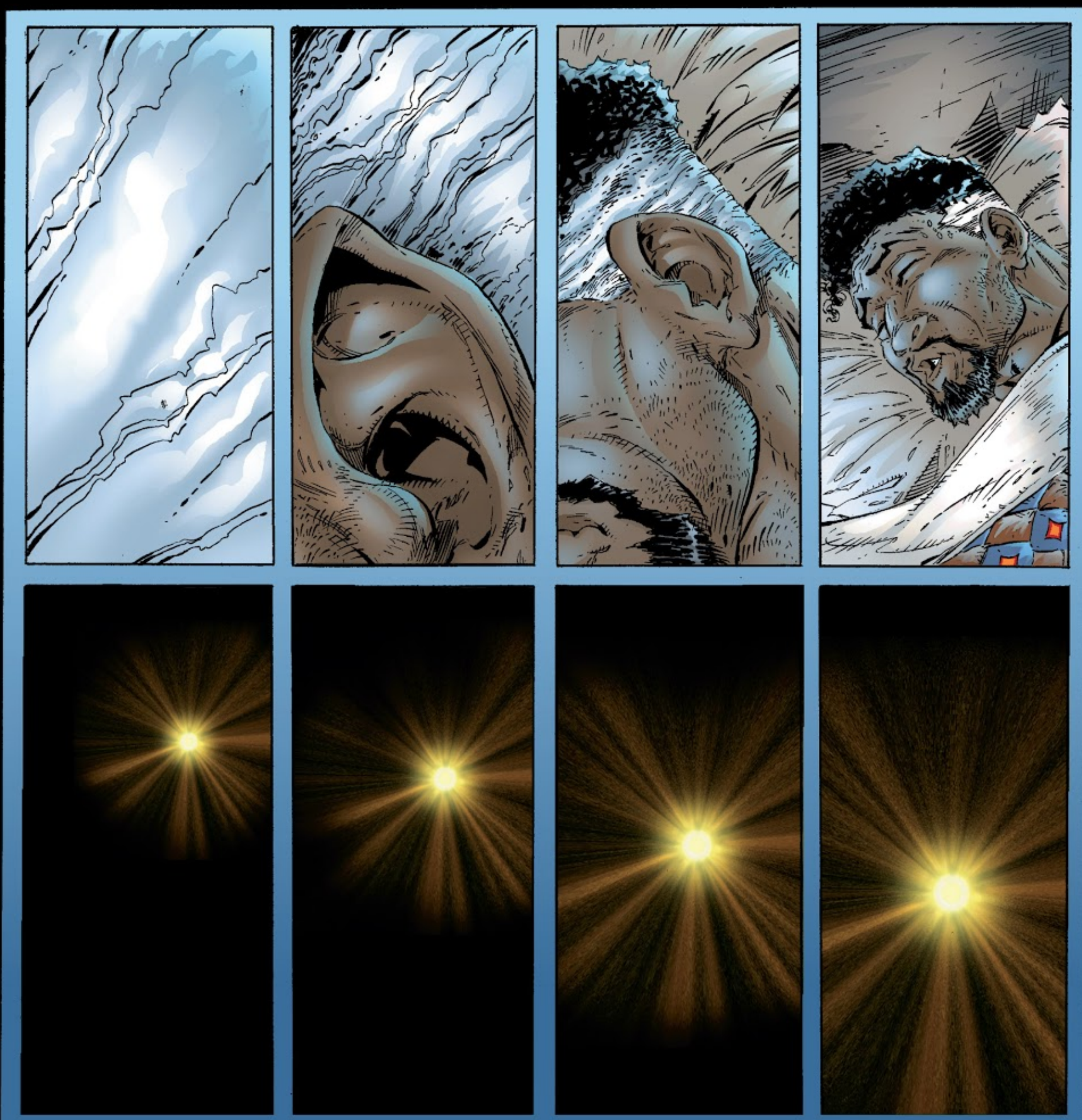
SHE IS UNAWARE THAT THE THING CALLED **"SPAWN"** -- THE CREATURE WHO FILLS HER WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY-- IS HER FORMER LOVE, **RETURNED FROM THE DEAD.**



IT'S BEEN OVER THREE HOURS SINCE HE CLOSED HIS EYES, YET THE **SLEEP** HE SO DESPERATELY WANTS CONTINUES TO EVADE HIM. SINCE HIS "MIRACULOUS" **CURE** FROM **CANCER**, REST HASN'T COME EASY. THE DREAMS... OR ARE THEY **NIGHTMARES?**... CREEP INTO HIS SUBCONSCIOUS, FLASHING RANDOM, **SENSELESS** IMAGES. FRUSTRATED BY THEIR **AMBIGUITY**, TERRY LIES THERE IN THE DARK, TRYING TO PIECE THIS PUZZLE TOGETHER.

THE ONLY PHYSICAL CLUE TO HIS RECOVERY -- THE BIZARRE, OVERLOOKED **DETAIL** -- LIES NOW IN A **CRIB**, NEXT TO HIS DAUGHTER: THE SHOELACE **RIPPED FROM THE VISAGE OF THE HELLSPAWN** DURING THE MOMENT OF THAT CREATURE'S UNWILLING, LIFESAVING GESTURE.

TO CURE TERRY. OUT OF LOVE FOR **WANDA.**



HE'D BEEN WARNED, THE HELLSPAWN HAD, AGAINST USING SUCH A **SUDDEN** BURST OF ENERGY. GIVEN THE **UNSTABLE** STATE OF SPAWN'S **SYMBIOTIC COSTUME**, THE **NEXT** ABRUPT DRAIN WOULD TRIGGER THE EJECTION OF THE WARRIOR FROM THIS EARTH AND INTO AN EXPEDITION THROUGH **HELL.**

GREEN NECROPLASMIC ENERGY EXPENDED IN THE CAUSE OF **GOOD** HAS ONCE AGAIN ADDED TO SPAWN'S MISERY. THE ONLY HOPE REMAINING FOR THE FORMER AL SIMMONS IS AN ETHEREAL **CONNECTION** TO HIS FRIEND. THOUGH NEITHER IS AWARE OF IT ON ANY LEVEL,THE GREYING AT TERRY'S TEMPLES IS PROOF THE TWO HAD BEEN IN CONTACT...

... THAT, AND THE SCRAMBLED IMAGES TRYING TO SPEAK TO TERRY AT NIGHT.

GASP!

JESUS... AL?

HE'S READ THE SIGNALS RIGHT.

IT'S OKAY. YOU'RE HAVING A BAD DREAM, THAT'S ALL.

WANT TO TALK?

WHAT'S WORSE, HE'S NOT READY TO SHARE HIS SUSPICIONS.

IT WOULD BRING HER TOO MUCH *PAIN*.

NOT REALLY.

GO BACK TO SLEEP. I'M GOING TO GET UP FOR A FEW MINUTES.

THIS IS CRAZY. IT'S BEEN FIVE *YEARS*. I HELPED *BURY* HIM, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

SOMETHING ISN'T RIGHT. THIS IS THE SECOND TIME SINCE I'VE BEEN HOME FROM THE HOSPITAL THAT IT'S HAPPENED.

WHY?

IS IT SOME SORT IMBALANCE CAUSED BY THE CANCER? THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH '*MIRACULOUS*' RECOVERIES -- NO ONE KNOWS WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO GO THROUGH AFTERWARDS.

BUT I SWEAR I CAN *FEEL* HIM -- HIS *EMPTINESS*.

*BEFORE HE'S ABLE TO DRIVE HIMSELF **COMPLETELY** INSANE, A SERIOUS DOSE OF **REALITY** THRUSTS IT-SELF UPON HIM.*

Lick Lick

C'MON, GIRL. *EASY* NOW! YOUR BREATH ISN'T EXACTLY PERFUME.

*SO THE FAMILY PET, ONCE RAISED BY AL SIMMONS HIMSELF, BRINGS A RAY OF **LIGHT** INTO A POTENTIALLY LONG, DARK NIGHT...*

...COMPLETING THE CIRCLE OF FOUR WHO'VE ALL BEEN TOUCHED BY A DEAD MAN.

SINCE REBORN.

FIGHTING TO KEEP HIS SOUL.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES.

ENTERING HELL'S FIFTH LEVEL LIKE SOME DARK, AVENGING ANGEL SHROUDED IN BLOOD BECOMES HIS **THIRD** TEST. IN THE FIRST **TWO** HE WAS AN **ENEMY.**

NOT HERE. NOT NOW.

A ROAR OF **PRAISE** THUNDERS THROUGH THE SEA OF PEOPLE. **EACH** NOW BELIEVES THEIR PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED.

THEIR SAVIOR IS RETURNED, JUST AS FORETOLD IN SCRIPTURE:

EACH OF US, UPON ENTERING HELL, BECOME PART OF ONE BODY. WE ARE THE ***UNBELIEVERS***. FAITH HAS FLED OUR HEARTS. DESPERATE TO FILL THAT VOID, WE EMBRACED ***JEALOUSY, LUST*** AND ***TREACHERY.*** OUR ***ENVY*** HAS COLORED OUR SKIN, MARKING US NOW AS THE TRUE OUTCASTS. STILL, HOPE HAS NOT ABANDONED US. THERE SHALL COME A DAY WHEN WE WILL BELIEVE AGAIN-- AND ***HE*** SHALL BE OUR LIGHT.

DRIPPING ***BLOOD*** GAINED IN ***BATTLE,*** WE WILL SEE IT IN HIS EYES-- ***FEEL*** IT IN HIS ***HEART. HE*** HAS ***MASTERED*** ENVY.

THE SCRIPTURES ALSO SAID THAT THE RETURNING KING WOULD RULE THROUGH **FORCE.** 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE' WOULD BECOME **LAW.**

FOR A TRILLION YEARS, A TRICKLE OF NEW BELIEVERS HAS GROWN TO A **MULTITUDE**... SO TOO HAS GROWN THEIR IMAGE OF THE **SAVIOR.**

JOY.

SKEPTICISM.

RAPTURE.

ANGER.

SPAWN'S ARRIVAL IS GREETED BY A **KALEIDOSCOPIC** RANGE OF EMOTIONS.

SOME BELIEVE. OTHERS DO **NOT.** THE FIRST TO EXPRESS DOUBT IS QUICKLY 'CONFRONTED.' THOSE WISHING TO ESCAPE HELL'S REACH **MUST** HAVE FAITH. **NONE** WILL BE ALLOWED TO CAST ASPERSIONS ON THEIR CHANCE AT HEAVEN.

QUITE PREDICTABLY, THEY FIND AN **ANSWER** FOR THE QUESTIONER.

WHAT ISN'T PREDICTABLE IS SPAWN BEING THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THE BLACK LORD CONTROLLED HIS CHILDREN EFFORTLESSLY BY HAVING EACH WAITING FOR A DEITY THAT HE KNEW WOULD NEVER COME.

THE PROPHECIES OF SCRIPTURE WERE NEVER SUPPOSED TO COME TO PASS. THEY WERE LIES -- FABRICATIONS OF THE DEVIL WHO RULES UNSEEN OVER THE FIFTH LEVEL.

EACH INDIVIDUAL'S PUNISHMENT WAS TO PRAY AN ETERNITY FOR SALVATION. A FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF SCRIPTURE WAS ALL THEY HAD LEFT.

GET THE HELL OFF ME!!!

THOSE WANTING TO WORSHIP HIM AND THOSE READY TO FLAY HIM STUMBLE OVER EACH OTHER TRYING TO REACH SPAWN FIRST.

THE CLOAKED HERO CARES FOR NEITHER.

ANGER NOW SEALS HIS FATE.

LEAVE ME ALONE!

IT IS HIM!

THE CHOSEN ONE.

HE CONTROLS THE ENVY.

THIS GOD BRINGS WITH HIM VALIDATION OF THEIR HOPES OF ENTRY TO HEAVEN. **FAITH** IS THE KEY TO HEAVEN'S GATE.

YET, A **PARASITE** LIVES IN EVERY COLONY.

IT'S IN HIS EYES, TOO! LOOK!

EXALTATIONS FOLLOW, AS ALL PRESENT DROP TO THEIR KNEES.

STAND UP!! DO NOT BE SO QUICK TO *SUBMIT*! REMEMBER THAT *ANOTHER* HAS COME FORTH RECENTLY. *BOTH* CANNOT BE ANOINTED!

WE'VE WAITED AN *INFINITY* FOR THIS DAY-- HOPING, PRAYING FOR OUR *SALVATION*. BUT NOW WE'VE GOTTEN *TWO* SIGNALS IN LESS THAN A DAY.

HOW DO WE KNOW *YOU* CAN SAVE US?

I CAN'T.

MODESTY. ANOTHER SIGN OF THE MESSIAH.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN,* YOU CAN'T?

THEN WHY ARE YOU *HERE* NOW?

AFTER A MOMENT'S HESITATION, SPAWN GIVES THE SHORT VERSION.

BECAUSE I LOVED MY WIFE.

SO THEY KILLED ME.

IT BEGINS.

*THOSE **CLOSEST** TO THE CONVERSATION REPEAT WHAT THEY'VE JUST HEARD.*

*AS IT SPREADS FAR AND WIDE THROUGH THE CROWD, IT BECOMES THE **GOSPEL**.*

*BY THE TIME IT'S HALF-WAY THROUGH THE CROWD, IT'S TAKEN ON A **LIFE OF ITS OWN**.*

HE *KILLED* HIS WIFE AND *LOVED* IT.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE. IT'S ALL THEY UNDERSTAND. BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO PROVE TO THEMSELVES THIS IS THE ACTUAL SECOND COMING.

THE MESSIAH MUST PASS A FINAL TEST.

FOR RECENTLY, ANOTHER HAS APPEARED BEFORE THEM.

LIKE THEIRS, HIS SKIN HAS A GREENISH PIGMENT. AND, HE BEARS ANOTHER FEATURE FORETOLD IN SCRIPTURE:

A FIN.

ONLY THE PROPHETS EXHIBITED THIS TRAIT.

SO, SACRIFICIAL GIFTS ARE THROWN IN HIS PATH.

THE RANKS HAVE BEEN THUS DIVIDED: THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE NEW GOD, AND THOSE WHO WISH TO FOLLOW THE PROPHET.

A BATTLE WILL EXPOSE THE IMPOSTER.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

SPAWN STARES INTENTLY FOR A MOMENT, TRYING TO PLACE HIS NEW FOE, WITHOUT SUCCESS.

HE TELLS HIMSELF IT'S JUST ANOTHER STRANGER TRYING TO BLUR HIS EXISTENCE.

ANOTHER OBSTACLE.

HELL HAS BECOME NO DIFFERENT FROM EARTH.

ALWAYS ON THE ATTACK, OR TAKING THINGS.

NEVER GIVING BACK.

WHAT'S WORSE IS THAT SPAWN **CHOSE** TO RETURN TO THE PITS OF HELL. HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO KEEP A WIFE WHO FEARS HIM **HAPPY.***

*ISSUE 50--Tom

AFTER ALL, HOW CAN A **DEAD, CURSED SOUL** IN HELL MAKE HIS SITUATION ANY WORSE?

HIS VICIOUS, RAGING ATTACK KNOWS NO BOUNDS.

INNOCENTS ARE CAUGHT IN THE FRAY.

HE DOESN'T RELENT UNTIL HIS GOAL IS MET:

ON EARTH, HIS USE OF HIS POWERS HAD TO BE **DISCREET**. IN HIS CURRENT STATE OF DAMNATION, HOWEVER, A BERSERKER'S **BELIGERANCE** IS CONSIDERED A **VIRTUE**.

ABSOLUTE **VICTORY** OVER HIS GREEN FOE.

HIS OPPONENT DRAWS A DEEP BREATH.

THE **NEXT** SOUND TO LEAVE HIS MOUTH IS LOST IN THE DIN OF A THOUSAND FOOTFALLS:

hee hee

BLASPHEMER

DEFILER

FALSE PROPHET

DIE

DIE

DIE

RAGE BOILS OVER. THEY'LL **NOT** ENDURE SUCH DIS-RESPECT TOWARD THEIR **DAMNATION.**

THEIR ETERNAL WAIT HAS EARNED THEM AT LEAST **THAT** COMPENSATION.

EVEN IF THE TRES-PASSER DOES BEAR '**THE MARK**'.

AND AS THE HULKING FIGURE IS MARCHED AWAY LIKE SOME HUNTER'S PRIZE **KILL**, HIS REACTION IS EVEN **MORE** STARTLING.

SPAWN SWEARS HE HEARS SOME-THING THAT JUST **CAN'T BE:**

GIGGLING.

A GLORIOUS CELEBRATION ENSUES, ENGULFING MOST OF THE GATHERING. THEIR KING HAS FINALLY COME FOR THEM. ALL SHALL BE SAVED.

WITH ONE EXCEPTION.

SO WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM?

WHEN THE DARKNESS COMES, HE'LL DIE.

WHEN HE APPEARED, HE GAVE US HOPE. HIS DEFEAT SHOWS HOW WE WERE BETRAYED, MY LORD.

SO HE IS BEING PREPARED -- BEFOULED WITH GRIME, FED HIS LAST MEAL, THEN SHOWERED IN URINE.

HIS CROSS IS BEING READIED. THE STONING WILL TAKE BUT A FEW MINUTES.

CRIMES AGAINST THE FAITH WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. ESPECIALLY THOSE COMMITTED BY HIS KIND.

I'D LIKE TO SPEAK TO HIM... ...PRIVATELY.

OF COURSE, MY LORD.

WHAT NOW? COME HERE TO DO A LITTLE *GLOATING*?

NOPE. I DON'T HAVE TO. YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT I CAN DO.

STILL, I'M CURIOUS ABOUT SOMETHING. OUT OF ALL YOUR PEOPLE, WHY WERE YOU SELECTED TO TAKE ME ON?

THOSE AREN'T "MY" PEOPLE. LOOK... YOU WANT TO FIGURE THIS OUT, *GREAT*. TO ME, THIS IS ALL SOME SCREWY DREAM OR HALLUCINATION.

BUT IF IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, I'LL SPILL MY GUTS. SEE, I'M FROM *CHICAGO*, SOME BIG CITY IN AMERICA. MY JOB IS TRYING TO CLEAN IT UP, WHICH MEANS I DEAL WITH PSYCHOS EVERY DAY. THE LAST ONE WAS SOME BROAD WHO CALLS HERSELF THE *FIEND*.* DON'T ASK ME WHY, BUT FOR SOME REASON SHE'S GOT THIS HARD-ON TO WIPE ME OUT. SO WE MET, AND SHE BLEW OFF MY *ARMS*.

AND THAT'S THE LAST I RECALL OF *REALITY*.

MY GUESS IS, SHE SHOT ME FULL OF *DRUGS* AND I'M *TRIPPING OUT* RIGHT NOW--

-- BECAUSE NEXT THING I KNOW I APPEAR IN *HELL*, BUCK NAKED, WITH BOTH ARMS BACK. AND EVERYONE I MEET THINKS I'M SOME GODDAMN *PROPHET*. MY FIN MEANS SOMETHING *SPIRITUAL* TO THEM.

WHEN *YOU* SHOWED UP, I WAS REDUCED TO SECOND BANANA. WHO WANTS A PROPHET WHEN A *GOD* COMES CALLING?

BESIDES, IT REALLY PISSED THEM OFF WHEN I SAID THEIR MESSIAH WOULDN'T APPEAR FOR ANOTHER *FORTY THOUSAND YEARS*.

AND THAT JUSTIFIES KILLING YOU?

LIKE I SAID, THIS IS JUST SOME *NIGHTMARE*. THEY WANTED A FIGHT, I *GAVE* IT TO THEM. *ONE* OF US HAD TO FAIL.

SO WHO CARES IF I WASN'T TOUGH ENOUGH. THAT'S THEIR PROBLEM.

WHAT?!

THAT'S RIGHT. WHICHEVER OF US LOST THAT BATTLE WAS TO BE EXECUTED. DON'T YOU SEE? IT'S A WITCH-HUNT. THEY NEED TO KILL ***ME*** TO JUSTIFY ***YOU.***

AND LOGIC BE DAMNED.

SO YOUR CRIME IS NOT BEING STRONGER?!

WHAT-EVER. THIS IS ***WAY*** BEYOND ***ME.***

MASTER. IT IS TIME.

THE PEOPLE AWAIT YOUR JUDGMENT.

*SPAWN TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS. HE **CAN'T.** INSTEAD, HE CHARGES AHEAD, USING WHAT HE **CAN:***

THEIR BLIND FAITH.

PEOPLE.. HEAR ME!

FREE HIM NOW. YOU MUST LEARN TO TURN THE **OTHER** CHEEK.

*THE CROWD FLIES INTO A **FRENZY.***

NO!

NO!

THIS MAN HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG. TO PERSECUTE HIM WOULD BE WRONG.

IF THEY WANT A MESSIAH, SO BE IT.

LIKE A STAMPEDE OF CATTLE, THE MOB CRUSHES SPAWN UNDER ITS SHEER WEIGHT.

RAVENOUS FOR BLOOD.

NEVER WOULD THE HOLY LEADER SUCH A DEMEANING ORDER AS, "FORGIVE."

"AN EYE FOR AN EYE."

SO IT IS WRITTEN.

SO IT SHALL BE.

LEGEND HAS SPOKEN OF THIS ENEMY ALSO. HOW THE FALSE GOD BEARS A SYMBOL OF HIS VILENESS.

A CALL TO 'TURN THE OTHER CHEEK' COMES ONLY FROM THE GREATEST SINNER.

SPAWN DIDN'T HAVE ONE. THAT DIDN'T MATTER. HE DID NOW.

THE CARVING WAS CRUDE.

YOUR RECKONING IS AT HAND.

THEY WILL SOON KNOW IN THE OTHER LEVELS *NOT* TO TRIFLE WITH OUR PRAYERS. YOUR DEATHS SHALL BE A TRIUMPHAL *TESTAMENT* TO OUR FAITH--

--*REDEDICATING* US TO OUR COMING *SALVATION*.

YOU *BOTH* SHALL DIE, FOREVER MARKED AS *TRAITORS*. *DESPITE* YOU, WE *SHALL* OVERCOME.

THE SELF-IMPOSED LEADER TURNS TO HIS MASSES.

LET HE WHO IS *WITH* SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE!

SADLY FOR THEM, THEIR WEAPONS WILL NOT STRIKE THEIR INTENDED TARGETS.

THE CRUCIFIED PAIR VANISH IN A BLINK.

THEIR VENGEANCE NOW DENIED, THE OCCUPANTS OF HELL'S FIFTH LEVEL CAN ONLY **RETURN** TO THEIR BELOVED **ALTAR**. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE EXACT SPOT WHERE THE **TRUE** GOD WILL RETURN. SO IT IS **WRITTEN**. SO IT SHALL **BE**.

BUT NONE WILL BE ABLE TO PREDICT THEIR **ACTUAL** FUTURE: THAT OF **ABJECT DAMNATION**. IN THEIR FAITH HAS NOW BEEN PLANTED A SEED OF **DOUBT**, AND IN THAT ENVIRONMENT THESE ACRES OF GREEN SOULS WILL DECLINE INTO **ROT**.

EACH BELIEVES THEIRS IS THE TRUE PATH TO CLEANSING. ANY **DISAGREEMENTS** WILL AT FIRST BE PEACEFUL-- **PHILOSOPHICAL** -- THEN ESCALATE WITH CHILLING EASE INTO **BATTLE LINES** DRAWN BETWEEN **ENEMIES**.

ANARCHY WILL BE THE RULE, SET IN MOTION FOR THE NEXT **MILLION YEARS** BY A PUPPET USED IN AN UNHOLY WAR.

THE ARRIVAL OF THIS SPAWN, NOW BRANDED, HAS SET FOREVER IN MOTION THESE CATA-CLYSMIC EVENTS. HIS **LORD**, THE EVIL **MALEBOLGIA**, HAS FINALLY FOUND A WAY TO EVEN A PERSONAL SCORE WITH THE RULER OF LEVEL FIVE.

FOR, THOUGH HELL DOES SEEK TO CONQUER THE POWERS OF **GOOD**, ITS LORDS ALSO SEEK TO **EVISCERATE** EACH OTHER.

IMAGINE WHAT THESE HELLISH BEINGS WOULD LEAVE IN THEIR WAKE ON THIS EARTH... !

NEXT:
SPAWN VS. MALEBOLGIA